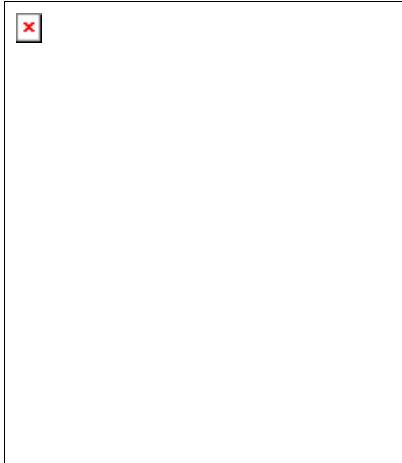




State leads way in 'green' building

BY SARAH DE CRESCENZO

2010-01-19 12:17:14



Already one of the most environmentally-conscious states, California is again leading the pack with the passage of the strictest green building codes in the nation.

The California Building Standards Commission approved the code, nicknamed Calgreen, last Tuesday. When the more stringent building code becomes mandatory Jan. 1, 2011, it will apply to new residential, commercial and public building construction.

The most difficult part of the code to comply with will be reducing indoor water use by 20 percent, energy consultant company ConSol President Mike Hodgson said.

Hodgson said builders will have to find items such as faucets and showerheads that keep the water use within acceptable limits.

He called the code, written with a great deal of input from builders, "fairly comprehensive."

The standards are meant to assist the state in reaching its energy conservation goals, with major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption and water expected.

In addition to the reduction in indoor water use, the code also specifies that 50 percent of construction waste be diverted from landfills, inspections of energy systems will be mandatory, and low-pollutant emitting interior finish materials must be used.

A second water requirement will be separate water meters for nonresidential buildings' indoor and outdoor water use and the addition of moisture-sensing irrigation systems for larger landscape projects.

Porterville architect Dennis Townsend, however, is not looking forward to the additional regulations.

Calgreen will be added to the basic state building code, which Townsend said became 15 percent more rigid compared to the previous year.

"We already have the most stringent codes as far as green building and energy saving in the U.S., so I'm pretty wary of adding additional regulations," he said.

He said he expects the new standards to be another blow to the already ailing construction industry.

"There are some good conservation ideas in there, but to have the state mandate it is a mistake," he said.

Another concern, Townsend said, is that increasing regulations will push builders to other states with a more lax building code.

He expects the costs of new homes to rise as builders pay to make them ever more energy efficient.

In addition, Townsend said, the role of those who use the buildings is being overlooked.

"You can put all the regulation you want to on buildings, but the way the end user uses it is what determines the energy usage more than anything else," Townsend said.

Home Builders Association of Tulare and Kings Counties Executive Officer Bob Keenan, on the other hand,

said the code has been "well-received" due to the collaboration involved in drafting the standards.

There will be no cost for certification under the new regulatory code. Currently, buildings can be certified under rating systems such as LEED, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

Now, a field inspection will be mandatory for a building to be labeled "CalGreen compliant."

Porterville home developer Greg Woodard has never gotten such a certification, through he said his homes fulfil many of the Calgreen requirements.

"It costs money and, quite frankly, the people buying from us know the quality of the work we are doing," he said. "In these economic times, buyers want to know we're keeping prices down."

Keenan said the code will help promote energy conservation measures many builders are already doing.

"We did it for self-protection, because we need a set of standards to promote green building and do something in the way of saving energy," he said.

The new code, Keenan said, was originally put into place in 2008 as a voluntary measure so local jurisdictions would not start enacting their own, variable regulations.

He said field inspections will keep certification from being arbitrary.

Hodgson, who runs a rating system through ConSol, said there will still be a place for above code certification programs with the advent of the state certification.

"I believe there is still a market for voluntary programs that differentiate builders or projects in the market," he wrote in an e-mail.

He also said the voluntary portions of the code provide hints as to where the regulatory measures are leading.

The market, Hodgson said, is preparing to alter its offering to accommodate builders' needs.

More water and energy efficient devices will be sold once Calgreen becomes mandatory in 2011, he said.

"They aren't really hard changes," he said, "we'll just have to make sure we use the right products."

-- Contact Sarah de Crescenzo at 784-5000, Ext. 1045, or sdecrescenzo@portervillerecorder.com.