

## Riverside program offers bigger efficiency rebates

11:10 PM PDT on Wednesday, May 5, 2010

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The Press-Enterprise

Bambi Tran prefers old houses, but she's not quite as keen on the higher heating, electric and other bills that often go with them.

So when she closed escrow in April on a 1913 home near downtown Riverside, she wanted to do something about the drafty windows, uninsulated attic and leaky ventilation system.

"We knew we were going to remodel," said Tran, a green building designer and consultant who bought the house with her partner, Karen. "One of the things I wanted to do was look into other energy retrofits."

The tab for fixing an inefficient home can run high, which discourages some homeowners. Enter Riverside's "whole house rebate" program.

The new program, which Riverside Public Utility officials believe is the first of its kind in the nation, gives homeowners points for each energy-efficient step they take, from buying a power-saving refrigerator to insulating the walls to planting water-saving landscaping.

The points are used as a multiplier, making homeowners eligible for more rebate cash as they do more to save water and energy.

Story continues below



David Bauman / The Press-Enterprise  
Riverside resident Bambi Tran hears from REEIS home performance analyst Paul Chenelia how energy is escaping through her living room windows in the circa 1913 home she just purchased. Rebates could cover much of the recommended work.

In an example on the rebate program's website, which was rolled out last month, putting in a dishwasher, ceiling fans and several other items would normally merit a total rebate of \$515, but the city program would boost that amount to nearly \$1,300.

Depending on how much a homeowner chooses to do, "This could easily cover more than half the cost of those energy saving measures," Riverside Public Utilities General Manager **David Wright** said.

An audit of Tran's home, performed by energy efficiency contractor REEIS, found several areas for improvement. Paul Chenelia, a REEIS analyst, used a fan to suck air out of the house, then checked vents, window frames and other places where air might escape.

"We'll see if you're the Titanic or the 'Poseidon Adventure,'" he quipped before measuring the leakage.

The test showed Tran's ventilation system leaks as much as 30 percent of the air passing through, so the contractor recommended sealing the ducts as well as insulating the attic, installing an air barrier around the chimney and several other measures.

The tab for all the items REEIS suggested for Tran's home came to about \$4,700. With a potential city rebate of about \$2,350, plus federal tax credits and discounts REEIS gets on appliances, the company estimated she would pay a little more than \$1,800 out of pocket.

Riverside is fertile ground for the whole house efficiency program. Wright said about half the homes in the city were built before the late 1970s, when building codes began to require significant insulation.

The program is being paid for with about \$700,000 in federal stimulus money, and the city will fund it when that runs out, Wright said.

Interest so far has been high. The program website gets about 150 hits a day, and the utilities department has seen a 25 percent increase in calls about rebates, said Mike Bacich, marketing and public relations manager for the city utility.

For officials at REEIS, which was started in Phoenix a year and a half ago, Riverside's rebate program was a factor in their decision to open an office here.

For Tran, getting the rebates may be the easy part. The work to remodel the house and make it more energy-efficient is just beginning.

"I think that's the joy of being homeowners – or the frustration of being homeowners," Tran said. "There are always projects to do."

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### **Whole house rebates**

A new program in Riverside offers homeowners more cash back for making their homes more energy or water efficient. Here's how it works.

**Measures** such as planting a shade tree or buying a water-saving toilet earn rebates and points.

**The number** of points a homeowner gets determines how much the rebate will increase.

**At least** 10 points boosts the rebate by 250 percent, so measures that would get \$515 back without the program will now net nearly \$1,300.

**Information** on rebate types and amounts and applications for the program are available at [www.riversideca.gov/utilities/resi-wholehouse.asp](http://www.riversideca.gov/utilities/resi-wholehouse.asp) or by calling 951-782-0330.

Source: Riverside Public Utilities

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