

Free Home Energy Upgrades for Napa County Residents

By Chris Benz

Over the past year, 38 Napa County homes received energy upgrades through the Bay Area Regional Energy Network's (BayREN) EASE Home Program, which subsidized 80% of the cost. Starting this summer, the Napa County Housing and Community Services Division is covering the remaining 20% co-pay, making these upgrades completely free for qualified homeowners and renters.

Napa County Sustainability Planners William Doran and Ryan Melendez have been talking to residents up and down the county to explain what the program covers.

"EASE Home is a home energy efficiency program that aims to reduce the amount of energy a home is using by providing upgrades that help insulate and seal the home," said Doran.

"Reduced energy use equals reduced energy bills," added Melendez.

The program is aimed at low- and middle-income residents who own or rent a single-family home (four or fewer units) built before 2010. For example, a household size of two with a gross annual income of less than \$153,825 would qualify.

A wide range of upgrades are covered. These include weatherization such as improved insulation, duct sealing or replacement, and whole-home air sealing; energy efficiency upgrades including smart thermostats and weatherstripping; and induction stove or cooktop replacement of a gas appliance (with compatible cookware and electrical upgrades).

"The process is really simple," Doran said.

The resident fills out an interest form at <https://tinyurl.com/NapaEASEHome>. County staff confirm eligibility and send the information to the contractor. An Energy Advisor visits the home and prepares a home energy assessment and a project proposal for the partnering contractor. The resident can choose which upgrades they want and then sign the project proposal. The work is then scheduled and is usually completed in one to two days.

"Most projects have been completed within two months of the application date," Doran noted proudly.

According to Melendez, the homes that see the biggest benefit are those built in the 1960's-70's, which were frequently under-insulated.

"Most research shows that inadequate attic insulation accounts for 20% of your energy bill," he said. "This one upgrade could reduce your annual energy bill by one-fifth."

This August and September, Napa County will be the focus of a program push, with contractors hoping to do four homes a week. While the cost of these projects typically runs from \$7,000 to \$10,000 per home, qualifying Napa County residents will have the entire cost covered by BayREN and the Napa County Housing and Community Services Division.

Rising Sun Green House Calls

The No-Cost Green House Call is a companion, BayREN-sponsored energy and water efficiency program available to all Napa County residents through July 31, regardless of income. Local youth trained as Energy Specialists through Rising Sun's Climate Careers program visit the home, conduct an in-home efficiency assessment, and install a wide variety of resource-saving devices including LED light bulbs, low-flow showerheads, and door sweeps.

Napa resident and local energy guru, Gopal Shanker, said after his Green House Call, "They left me with the following freebies: a portable single-burner induction cooktop with an induction-compatible frying pan, an LED night light, a color LED light bulb, a smart socket, and dryer balls."

The program currently employs 13 Napa County youths, aged 15 to 24, who are making Green House Calls through July 31.

"We'd love to identify more local homes for our young Energy Specialists to visit," said Malaika Khan, Outreach Manager for Rising Sun. In addition to hands-on field experience, youth participants take part in weekly professional development workshops focused on career readiness, financial literacy, and environmental justice, she explained.

Take advantage of these free programs and treat yourself to a lower utility bill!

Actions you can take:

1. Contact Doran or Melendez at BayREN@CountyOfNapa.org, or over the phone at **(707) 253-4417**.
2. Learn more at the BayREN EASE Home website: <https://www.bayren.org/ease-home>
3. Attend a public BayREN workshop: July 29th, American Canyon Library, 300 Crawford Way, American Canyon, 6 – 7 pm.
4. Sign up for a No-Cost Green House Call at <https://risingsun.tfaforms.net/f/GHC>.

Chris Benz is a retired winemaker and co-founder of Napa Climate NOW!

Napa Climate NOW! is a local nonprofit citizens' group advocating for smart climate solutions based on the latest climate science, part of 350 Bay Area.

Info, napa.350bayareorg

Photo Credit: Chris Benz

Photo Caption: Rising Sun Energy Specialists Brandon Lopez and Jorge Castro install LED light bulbs during a No-Cost Green House Call.

