

HEADLINE: Making ecological and economic sense

Buyers (and sellers) have a lot on their minds when approaching a purchase as significant as a new home. While an agent needs to be skilled at handling the logistics of a transaction, the ability to place the purchase in a larger context allows clients to have more peace of mind while also imparting that the agent has dealt with every last detail. With this in mind, being able to connect what is for most people the largest personal business deal they will ever undertake to an opportunity to improve the environment gives an agent a great edge. The National Association of Green Agents and Brokers (NAGAB) offers training courses and exclusive business opportunities that expand real estate professionals' skill set.

NAGAB membership offers an advantage to prospective members in its agreement with AmeriSpec, Canada's largest provider of the ecoENERGY program through the Office of Energy Efficiency at Natural Resources Canada. AmeriSpec has been conducting home energy efficiency evaluations under the ecoENERGY program since its inception as Energuide for Houses six years ago. It is now partnering with NAGAB to offer accredited NAGAB members a guaranteed rate of \$300 for D and \$150 for E home inspections across Canada. "AmeriSpec has partnered with NAGAB to provide members with a great service that they can provide for clients – the gift of a more energy efficient home. We're helping Canadians qualify for retrofit grant incentives, make their homes more comfortable and do what's right for the environment," says Vivian Konney, Marketing and Communications Coordinator at AmeriSpec.

The education that NAGAB provides also enables a better rapport with potential clients. "The knowledge I gained from my NAGAB certification has already impressed one set of buyers I may have otherwise lost," says recently NAGAB certified agent Stephen Clark of Whitby, Ontario. "I became interested when I received email about the courses, and as soon as there were some available I took them right away. To be considered green you almost have to take the courses, there is just so much to learn for the average person who already recycles, buys green light bulbs, changes his toilet to one which uses less water, installs an efficient shower head and thinks that's all there is to being green. It's important, and only a small percentage of agents have this knowledge."

Real Estate Boards across the country can see the value of going green. Victoria Real Estate Board President, Tony Joe, says he liked the idea of focusing on green initiatives as a theme for his year as President. "There has been a growing awareness of the importance of green values among many buyers and sellers on Southern Vancouver Island. Other jurisdictions in California, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand already require energy audits on private homes as part of full disclosure at the time of sale," says Joe. In addition, he foresees the even greater implications that green real estate practices might have in a few years time. "We also felt it was the right thing to do given the general increasing public awareness about climate change, and discussion at various government levels about carbon taxes and other environmental issues."

Toronto Green Realtor and Olympic silver medalist Angela Bailey has recently begun the NAGAB accreditation process. "I want to have the opportunity to enhance my knowledge and gain greater credibility when I speak to clients regarding green real estate, and was pleased to find out that NAGAB existed. I think it is about time we live in homes that contribute as much as possible to a healthy system," says Bailey. "I think information will help the public do better by the environment as they strive for their dream homes. In the mean time I look forward to helping clients go green in their current living environment, and showing them that they are making a positive impact."

The ability to offer ecological assurances coupled with economic savings greatly enhances the marketability of agents and brokers. In a competitive market, distinguishing yourself by being able to offer value-added information such as how to save on utility costs and increase home value, along with a strong ethical component like a gift ecoENERGY inspection on listing or closing, confers a great advantage. For more information about NAGAB, visit www.nagab.org online.