Building Success 101

Q: How does steam drying work?

A: A few appliance manufacturers have introduced steam as a drying agent in their clothes dryers, primarily to save energy and reduce wrinkles. Essentially, these appliances are engineered to recycle the steam generated by the moisture in the clothes as they dry, though without lengthening the drying time. In fact, most steam dryers complete a normal cycle faster than a conventional dryer and with better results.

Green Building: Major Appliances

Without a doubt, the kitchen is one of the most important rooms in any new home. Sometimes called "the heart of the home," the kitchen is also the heart of a home's energy use. Because of cooking fumes and perhaps the use of natural gas or propane, the kitchen may also be the heart of poor indoor air quality.

As a professional builder, we are committed to the creation of kitchens that are functional, convenient, beautiful, and energy efficient. Every major appliance, both in the kitchen and beyond, must have high quality features and proven energy efficiency. After all, major appliances are now found throughout the home, from kitchen to laundry room, to morning and outdoor kitchens. All have an impact on the use of energy in the home and on the quality of indoor air.

Most of today's major appliances, including laundry equipment, are qualified by the federal Energy Star program (www.energystar.gov), which sets minimum standards for energy use and estimated costs and savings over a year's worth of use. The leading manufacturers are all represented on the list of qualified appliances. Products at nearly every price, energy source (gas or electric), and range of features are listed. Regardless of the owner's budget or the price of the home, there is a suitable Energy Star appliance package.

Major appliances have come a long ways in a short time towards energy and cost efficiency. For instance, refrigerators have quieter, more efficient motors and are better insulated to maintain a constant temperature. Wear and tear on the system is reduced together with energy requirements. Not long ago, refrigerators used chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as coolants, which were widely held to destroy the ozone layer. Refrigerators now use non-CFC or HCFC agents for the cooling process so that their carbon footprint is reduced along with their potential for contamination of the environment.

Better technology has also improved convection and microwave ovens. Desired temperatures are reached faster and food is cooked more thoroughly in less time. The addition of more cooking settings also helps to avoid overworking the appliance. Energy use is reduced and the life of the appliance is extended.

Dishwashers and clothes washers are engineered to use precise amounts of water and energy to suit the size and type of the load. Clothes dryers have also been redesigned to reduce energy consumption without sacrificing performance.

Indoor air quality is a critical component in a healthy, high performance home. To a builder, that means taking care to provide adequate ventilation in structures where the use of vapor barriers and insulated windows has become standard. Kitchens and laundry rooms, especially, create moisture that must be exhausted. A fan of appropriate size and power can help to maintain good quality indoor air and to reduce moisture damage to wood and metal components in the house. High tech fans feature moisture sensors that engage and disengage their operation automatically, thus saving energy by operating the fan for exactly the right length of time and not a minute more.

Major appliances on the market today offer a bewildering array of styles and features, making it difficult to choose the most energy efficient machines that are suited to your plans and budget. Fortunately, our commitment to building high performance -- or "green built" -- homes has made us familiar with the energy-saving features of most major appliances. We can help you find what you want in products that suit your budget and personal taste.

Warm regards,

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