

Frequently Asked Questions for Homeowners

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What is a Home Energy Score?

The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE's) Home Energy Score provides information that helps you understand your home's energy efficiency and how to improve it. The Home Energy Score is comprised of three parts including: 1) the Score itself, 2) facts about your home, and 3) recommended improvements to increase your Score.

After a 1-hour energy assessment by a qualified home energy assessor ("Qualified Assessor"), you will receive a Score that rates your home on a simple 1 to 10 scale. A Score of a "1" represents the least energy efficient home and a "10" represents the most energy efficient home. The Score also shows you where your home would rank if you made the energy-saving improvements identified during your home walk-through. The Home Energy Score and associated report is generated through DOE/Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory software called the Home Energy Scoring Tool.

Why should I get a Home Energy Score?

Your Home Energy Score will show you how your home's efficiency compares to other homes, and will identify energy improvements that will save you money and raise your Score. As an added bonus, these improvements will likely enhance how comfortable you feel in your home and may improve the air quality in your home. If you've already made home energy improvements, your Score can officially recognize your home's higher performance level—a useful indicator if you're planning on selling your home soon.

What types of homes can get a Home Energy Score?

At this time, only single family homes and townhomes can be scored. Multifamily and mobile homes cannot be scored.

How do I get a Home Energy Score?

In 2012, the Home Energy Score is only available in areas served by DOE's official Home Energy Score Partners. A list of current Partners can be found at www.homeenergyscore.gov. If you live in one of these areas, contact the Partner organization to schedule a Home Energy Score. DOE plans to continue to expand the program as new Partners come on board. If there is no Partner in your area, ask your local utility or state energy office when the Home Energy Score will be available in your area. You may also be able to find a qualifying home inspector in your area who is working under one of DOE's national Partners.

What does the Qualified Assessor look for during a Home Energy Score walk-through?

When your Qualified Assessor does the walk-through of your home, she or he will collect about 40 pieces of information. Information about your home's "envelope" (insulation, windows, etc.) as well as its heating, cooling and hot water systems will be entered into the Home Energy Scoring Tool software. Information about how residents operate the house and non-permanent house features like lighting, home electronics and appliances are not included in the Score calculation since these are not considered to be fixed assets.

How is the Home Energy Score calculated?

To calculate a home's Score, a qualified home energy assessor inputs information about a home's characteristics into an energy modeling software developed by DOE and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Based on these home characteristics, the software estimates the home's annual energy use, assuming typical homeowner behavior. The software then converts the estimated energy use into a Score, based on a 10-point scale. This scale accounts for differences in weather conditions by using the zip code to assign the house to one of more than 240 weather stations. The Home Energy Scoring Tool software was designed so that Scores for different homes can be compared to one another regardless of where the homes are located or the number of people currently living in those homes.

Does a home with a poor (lower) Score always use more energy than a home with a better (higher) Score?

A home with a lower Score does not necessarily use more energy than a home with a higher Score. The Home Energy Score is designed as an “asset rating” meaning that the Score reflects a home's structure and mechanical systems—for instance its insulation, air leakiness and heating and cooling equipment—not how the occupants use the home. For example, a family that sets their thermostat very low in the summer to keep cool, and never turns off lights and electronics, may still have very high energy bills even in a high-scoring, efficient home.

Homes in different parts of the country use different amounts of energy because of climatic differences. A high-scoring home in New England may still use more energy than a drafty home in Southern California just because of the difference in climate.

Does the size of my home matter?

Yes, the size of your home matters because larger homes tend to use more energy. If two houses have the same structure and equipment, but one is bigger, the smaller house will generally receive a higher (better) Score.

Would my Score be the same in different parts of the country?

Yes. You can use the Home Energy Score (in general) to compare one home to another in a different part of the country. However, you cannot use the Home Energy Score to compare your *energy bill* to another home across the country. The Home Energy Scoring Tool software takes into account the typical range of energy consumption in the region where you live and scores your home against that range. (See question “How is the Home Energy Score calculated?” answered above).

What's the average Score?

Just like there is no average home, there is no average Score. More important than knowing how a home compares to the average is seeing how it compares to other homes that you might be looking at, and most importantly how well it could score with cost-effective improvements. The Score tells you what your improved Score would be if you made the recommended energy upgrades.

If a home scores a 10 does this mean the home has zero energy consumption and zero energy costs?

No. It means that the home uses very little energy given where it is located in the country.

The Home Energy Scoring Tool calculates energy savings based on the behavior of a typical homeowner. Is it possible to customize the energy savings based on actual family size and actual energy consumption?

Not with the Home Energy Scoring Tool itself. However, additional information about the home and the homeowner's behavior can be added in through a consumer tool called "Home Energy Saver." The information that the Qualified Assessor enters into the Home Energy Scoring Tool will be available to the homeowner through Home Energy Saver. A homeowner can access that information and add fields to customize the information about how they use the home as well as data about non-fixed assets such as lighting and electronics. The Home Energy Saver lets you compare different combinations of home energy improvements and gives you the opportunity to enter in the estimated cost of improvements if you have received estimates.

How much does an assessment cost homeowners?

The cost of the Score will depend on what the market allows in that area. DOE does not control the fees charged by Qualified Assessors. The Home Energy Score will often be offered as part of other audit or inspection services, so the cost may be built into the fee for another service.

How can a homeowner finance the recommended energy improvements suggested in the Home Energy Score?

Homeowners should work with their energy improvement contractor or utility and visit www.dsireusa.org to find out about local, state, and federal incentive programs.

How long does it take to realize savings from the Score's recommendations?

The total savings estimate shown with the home's Score reflects the gross energy cost savings that would result over 10 years from completing all the recommended improvements. The recommendations page lists annual dollar savings per improvement. Homeowners should expect to realize some savings as soon as they make improvements—however, the time required to recover the cost of making the improvements will vary depending upon the individual case. Some improvements can pay off within a couple of years; others take longer. Energy improvements recommended by the Home Energy Scoring Tool will generally pay back in 10 years or less.

Visit homeenergyscore.gov for more information.