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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 homeowners understand their 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 the home, and 3) recommended improvements to increase the Score.

After a 1-hour energy assessment by a qualified home energy assessor ("Qualified Assessor"), homeowners will receive a Score that rates their 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 where a home would rank if all of the energy-saving improvements identified during the home walk-through were made. The Home Energy Score and associated report is generated through DOE/Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory software called the Home Energy Scoring Tool.

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.

Where is the Home Energy Score offered?

In 2012, the Home Energy Score is available in areas served by DOE's official Home Energy Score Partners. A list of current Partners can be found at www.homeenergyscore.gov.

Who can become a Home Energy Score Partner?

The U.S. Department of Energy is partnering with state and local governments, utilities, and non-profits to implement the Home Energy Score as part of their residential energy programs or other offerings. Home Energy Score Partners must be able to 1) score a minimum of 200 homes in the first year, 2) use and oversee BPI or RESNET-certified contractors to perform the home energy assessments, and 3) conduct quality assurance—that is, re-score 5% of the homes.

If you are interested in becoming a Home Energy Score Partner, send an email to homeenergyscore@ee.doe.gov with "Interested Partner" in the subject line.

Why should I become a Home Energy Score Partner?

The Home Energy Score is only available through DOE's participating Partners. It can be used as a quick, simple marketing tool for home performance upgrades and carries the credibility of the U.S. Department of Energy. Because the Home Energy Score lets homeowners see how their home stacks up on a simple scale, it can be a powerful motivator in getting homeowners to make energy efficiency improvements. It's also a great way to help trained workers enter the private sector energy improvement market as funding for weatherization efforts decline.

As a Home Energy Score Partner, you will have access to a personal Account Manager and technical staff to assist you in developing your program and to connect you with relevant resources. You will be able to help guide future developments of the Home Energy Score, and you will be able to share lessons learned and engage in networking opportunities with other Partners and DOE programs.

What is required of Partners?

Partners must: 1) score a minimum of 200 homes in the first year, 2) manage the Qualified Assessors participating in their local program, and 3) conduct quality assurance reviews on a sample of scored homes. This involves having a different quality assurance provider or Qualified Assessor rescore 5% of the scored homes. Partners are also expected to participate in regular calls and webinars with DOE and other Partners, market the Home Energy Score locally, and collaborate with DOE on delivery and continuous improvement of the program.

Partners have to score 200 homes in the first year. When does that start/end?

Each Partner is expected to score at least 200 homes within the first year of participation. The time period begins when the Partner scores its first home. After the first year, DOE will work with Partners to establish annual numeric goals with the intent of increasing the number of scored homes each year.

How do I apply to become a Partner?

If you are interested in becoming a Home Energy Score Partner, send an email to homeenergyscore@ee.doe.gov with “Interested Partner” in the subject line. We will then send you a Partner Packet with materials to review. If you think your organization is a good fit for becoming a Home Energy Score Partner, we will schedule a follow-up call with you to discuss this opportunity.

Can the Home Energy Scoring Tool be integrated with other software tools we already use?

Yes. An Application Programming Interface (API) allows a seamless link to the Home Energy Scoring Tool from other software tools. This eliminates the need to enter data separately into two systems. Use of the API requires some upfront programming by your organization or the provider of your software tool to ensure proper translation of data from your software program to the Home Energy Scoring Tool.

What are the criteria for Qualified Assessors?

Qualified Assessors can only score homes by working through an official Home Energy Score Partner. In order to become a Qualified Assessor, all candidates must provide proof of certification as a Building Analyst from the Building Performance Institute (BPI) or as a certified Rater from a Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET) Provider. Once these certifications are verified, the candidate assessors must pass an online test which covers building science and Home Energy Score information, as well as successfully score three sample, hypothetical homes.

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

When a Qualified Assessor does a walk-through of a home, she or he will collect about 40 pieces of information. Information about a 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.

Can the Score be customized?

DOE is exploring options that would allow Partners to customize the Score for use in their area. Active Partners that are interested in customizing the Score should discuss this with their DOE Account Manager. Organizations interested in becoming Partners can send questions to homeenergyscore@ee.doe.gov.

How much does an assessment cost homeowners?

DOE does not determine how much an assessor charges for the Home Energy Score. It will depend on what the local market supports. However, DOE does not charge its Partners or Qualified Assessors to participate in the program or use the Home Energy Scoring Tool. Partners have indicated plans to charge between \$25 and \$125 for the Home Energy Score.

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.

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 the home matter in generating a Score?

Yes, the size of the 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.

Visit homeenergyscore.gov for more information.