

UNDERSTANDING HOME ENERGY ASSESSMENT

What is an Energy Assessment?

It is when you hire a certified home energy technician (also referred to as an: auditor, assessor, inspector, analyst, rater) to come to your home to review all of the energy components inside and outside of your dwelling unit. The technician will conduct a detailed examine using home performance technology, software, and diagnostic tools (such as infrared camera, blower door test, etc.). The technician will look at your insulation, heating and air conditioning systems, windows, doors, duct work, lighting, appliances, furnace, water heater, holes where electrical lines pass through and more. The auditor examines for cracks, leaks, sealing, problems, and improvements. Tests and inspections are conducted to find out where your home could be more energy efficient. The auditor reviews all of the ways energy escapes your home then gives you a customized comprehensive energy report with details, recommendations of any items that should be fixed, suggested upgrades, estimated costs, and projected savings. A home energy auditor should not be tied to the same company that would install or purchase the materials you need to improve your home. The home energy technician should be a third party inspector that does not profit from any installations or products that may be needed to fix or upgrade your home.

Why get an Energy Assessment?

Save Energy. Save Money. Be More Comfortable in Your Home. An Energy Assessment is a good place to start when looking for reasons your utility bills are high, ways to save money, and possible upgrade opportunities. Rebates, incentives, or tax credits may be available. Conducting an audit enables you to: ensure the products in your home are effectively operating, obtain an expert opinion if and what appropriate items could enhance your energy efficiency, prioritize the improvement opportunities, put together a cost effective plan, and budget accordingly.

What Licenses Do They Need?

Energy Raters (Inspectors, Auditors, Analysts, Assessors) should have at least 2 years of experience performing energy efficiency audits or commissioning along with a certified license from one of the following:

- Building Performance Institute (BPI)
- Build It Green (BIG)
- Association of Energy Engineers (AEE)
- American Society of Heating, Refrigerating & Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE)
- California Association of Building Energy Consultants (CABEC)
- Northwest Energy Education Institute (NWEEI)
- Residential Energy Service Network (RESNET)

*There may be a few others. Be sure to verify certification and qualifications for services required.

What is HERS?

HERS stands for Home Energy Rating System and is a nationally recognized industry standard for measuring a home's energy performance. A HERS Index or Rating is the number on the HERS scale indicating the inspected, calculated and measured energy efficiency the home is currently producing. For example, if your home was a car you were looking to purchase; you may look at how many miles per gallon it gets. Now you can look at a HERS rated home and know how energy efficient the home is going to be. The lower the HERS Index Score number, the more energy efficient the home will be.

What is a HERS Rater?

A HERS Rater is the licensed and certified professional by an accredited Home Energy Rating Provider. Currently, there are only three providers that can certify a rater: CalCERTS, CHEERS, and USERA but you can verify here: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/HERS/providers.html>. The HERS Rater is a third party inspector that can conduct inspections and evaluations of home's energy features and develops a home's energy rating score (HERS Rating or HERS Index Score) in addition to making recommendations for energy efficient improvements. A HERS Rater must be a third party. For example, a HVAC Company cannot also be the HERS Rater conducting inspections on their own work. The HVAC Company and the HERS Rater must be two separate affiliations.

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Energy Assessment Subcontractor Advice?

There are a few things you should know when it comes to hiring the right companies to complete the energy assessment suggestions:

1. **Be sure you hire licensed contractors** and verify the person you are working with is employed by the licensed contractor. Companies you are purchasing products from or hiring as the installers for the “energy assessment recommendations” should not have any affiliation with the energy auditor. You can review a contractor’s license on the California State Contractors License Board Website: <http://bit.ly/1S0yjEb> or call: (800) 321 - 2752. Be sure to request three references from the contractor you would like to hire and verify the references (either by calling and/or going to see the actual completed work they have done for another customer).
2. **Ask family and friends for recommendations.** You may ask the energy auditor for unaffiliated contractor suggestions but be sure to get three different ones. If you still need more suggested contractors, you can ask material suppliers, financial groups, or neighborhood customers. You can also find local contractors by contacting your local blue book of building and construction, chamber of commerce, local trade associations, yellow pages, yelp, etc. Again, refer to #1 above.
3. **Obtain three proposals per construction trade** (HVAC, Insulation, etc) and make sure you are comparing the same plans, specifications, materials, warranties, and detailed scopes of work each contractor submits. Be sure to question and re-review any proposals that come in substantially lower or different than other bidders.
4. By law, your contract with the contractor should include a **three day right to cancel clause**.
5. **Verify your contractor has Workers Comp and General Liability Insurance.** Workers Comp insurance is found on the California State Contractors License Board Website: <http://bit.ly/1S0yjEb> or Call: (800) 321 - 2752.
6. **Contract should list approximate dates of when the work will start and be completed.**
7. **Make sure your hired contractor is planning to and does obtain building permits** from your local building department. For example: replacing an air conditioning system now requires pulling a building permit. The contractor and homeowner can be fined and penalized for not meeting compliance and the homeowners insurance can be void. Having a permit also ensures the work was installed and completed correctly because a building inspector has to come out and verify it. Visit the California State Contractors License Board Reference Page: <http://bit.ly/1PAI5vE> to find out if a permit should be pulled for your project. Find out if the permit fees are included in your contract with the contractor. Also, find out if you are going to get copies and receipts for any permits needed.
8. **Make sure you completely understand your contracts.** If you have any questions or concerns be sure to get it clarified in writing prior to work starting and signing the agreement. In addition, if the scope of work changes during the process, get it in writing. The contract should include a detailed description of the work that is going to be done, the materials that will be used, equipment that will be installed, if there is a payment schedule (pay only as work is completed), warranties, and permit information. You may want to inquire about any necessary equipment maintenance and usage training for you and your family.
9. **Do not pay more than 10% down or no more than \$1,000 prior to the work starting.** Keep a record of payments made, receipts, photographs of before and after, and copies of all contracts and documentation. Do not make final payment until final inspections are completed.
10. **Third Party Inspector (energy auditor) is sometimes required to return post installation of new or updated completed work.** Even when not required, it is nice to have the comfort of knowing the work was done correctly. Hiring the third party energy auditor to return to the home ensures you made a successful investment. Again, be sure the energy inspector has no affiliation with the companies that completed the installations or products purchased.