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Trailers pass energy tests

Independent energy audits give FEMA homes high marks

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Energy audits of two randomly selected temporary housing units this week showed the units are about as energy efficient as they can be.

A coalition of utility companies, non-profit entities and public officials obtained the auditing services of Community Action Partnership to find out if the Federal Emergency Management Agency's housing units are built to handle a frigid North Dakota winter.

After performing inspections on the smaller 12-foot by 32-foot unit Monday and a larger, three-bedroom unit Tuesday, energy auditors with Community Action reported the answer is yes. Both inspected units were on private sites.

Some residents of the temporary units in Minot have reported their units to be cold or the floors to be extremely cold. However, Community Action found no issues with the two homes inspected. Using a blower door to depressurize and determine the tightness of the home and an infrared camera to detect leaks, the crew discovered no significant problems.

The homes actually were tighter than is standard, which was better than what Community Action expected to find, said John Meyer, energy conservation coordinator.

"They seem to be very well constructed, not drafty, not leaky," he said. "The insulation that we found so far is compatible with Climate Zone 1, which is what North Dakota is."

The federal Housing and Urban Development Department prohibits using FEMA homes designed for warmer climates in a Zone 1, he said. Jerusha Schiessl, resident

of one of the inspected homes, said her family has been comfortable with the thermostat set at 69 degrees. She and her husband, Chris, share the home with their four young children.

One of the doors to the outside has a bit of a draft, but the unit's sheltered location eliminates much of the concern on cold, windy days, Jarusha Schiessl said.

Meyer said increasing the tightness of either of the inspected units isn't recommended. If a home is too tight, there can be air quality and mold issues.

Based on the audits, Community Action recommended residents leave exhaust fans running at least 20 minutes after showering and when cooking to minimize moisture buildup.

Other recommendations for residents of temporary units are to try to limit the number of times doors are opened and closed to keep heat inside. Residents should consider quilted or lined window treatments or window film to add insulating value and address any drafty areas around windows.

Residents should never use an unvented propane or kerosene heater, which can lead to a dangerous build-up of carbon monoxide inside the home. For safety reasons, they also should avoid using electric space heaters.

Xcel Energy, Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. and Verendrye Electric Cooperative also suggest that residents ensure that carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are installed and working. Any holiday lights should be unplugged before residents leave the house or go to sleep.

Homeowners whose houses are under restoration should set their thermostats at a reasonable temperature, insulate and then air seal the area that will be heated, as long as the home has dried.



Bill Dunn with Community Action Partnership, standing in front of a door with a blower fan, sets up to conduct a test to check for tightness of a FEMA home in southeast Minot Tuesday.

Utility companies recommend that if a house is being heated to prevent the foundation from frost heaving, homeowners should isolate the basement with insulation and only heat the basement level.

Through Dec. 31, rebates are available for high-efficiency natural gas and propane furnaces.

Meyer said people may find their electric bills are high because the FEMA temporary units rely heavily on electricity not just for heat but for all appliances. If people using electric heats, lights and power tools in the houses they are rebuilding, those costs also are rolled into that electric bill, he said.

Local utilities are offering flexible payment plans to customers who are experiencing difficulty paying. To contact the utilities to discuss energy bills or make payment arrangements, customers can call Xcel Energy at 1-800-895-4999, Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. at 1-800-638-3278 or Verendrye Electric Cooperative at 1-800-472-2141.

For more information on safely and efficiently heating your home this winter, contact the Ward County Extension office at 857-6450.



Bill Swartwout with Community Action Partnership holds an infrared camera to check for air leaks in a FEMA home as resident Jerusha Schiessl and son Austin watch in the background.

No decision
made for
flood plan

Obama blames GOP for tax increase

WASHINGTON (AP) — Continuing a tax cut of up to \$40 a



House Speaker John Boehner of