



## **New Ohio Building Code Raises the Bar for Energy-Efficiency and Safety**

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The Ohio Department of Commerce recently adopted a new residential building code that should lead to increased savings and safety for homeowners, but add compliance concerns for homebuilders. The new code goes into effect January 1, 2013 and represents “a monumental update” from the current code, which was last modified in 2003, according to Corey Roblee, a manager with the International Code Council, the non-profit that designs building codes.

The new code primarily focuses on energy-efficiency and safety issues and mandates higher standards than previously required. Nonetheless, some Ohio builders, custom homebuilders in particular, already meet or exceed the code’s new standards. However, beginning in 2013, all homebuilders will be required to comply with the new requirements. Some of the notable changes from the previous code include:

- Requiring carbon-monoxide detectors outside of each bedroom in homes that use gas or propane or have an attached garage.
- Requiring that homes have at least 75% high-efficiency light bulbs, such as compact fluorescent bulbs.
- Requiring higher levels of insulation for exterior (from R-13 to R-20) and basement walls (from R-5 to R-10).
- Requiring that homes meet an air-tightness standard, as measured by a blower-door test.

The code updates are the result of a compromise between environmentalist groups lobbying for more stringent energy standards and homebuilders worried that higher standards would lead to drastically higher prices for homes. The results appeal to both groups - environmentalists are satisfied with the improvements in energy efficiency and homebuilders are happy that the new regulations will not have as adverse of an impact on construction costs as originally proposed. Homebuilders are also pleased that the new code allows them some flexibility. The code’s provisions allow homebuilders to achieve energy efficiency in one of two ways: either by following the International Code Council’s guidelines or by following alternative builder-designed guidelines that will achieve the same energy savings.

Despite the above compromise, the changes to the code will cause home prices to rise. It is estimated that the new regulations will add \$1,100 to \$1,200 to the price of a 1800-square-foot two-story home. However, this higher initial investment should be offset by significantly lower energy bills, thanks to increased efficiency. A 2009 U.S. Department of Energy study in Boston found that a similar change to the city’s residential building code would save homeowners around \$230 a year in energy bills. Thus, homeowners can expect to recoup the additional costs in just a few years.

Homebuilders who do not comply with the code’s provisions will be required to bring the offending homes up to code at their own expense. Failure to do so will give rise to further civil liability.