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Energy Neutral Products Take Homeowners to the Next Level for Eco-Friendly Additions

With the “green” trend continually growing, many homeowners are swapping old air conditioning units, heaters and appliances with more energy efficient models. While purchasing ENERGY STAR® appliances and green rated products are a major step forward in being environmentally conscious, there are additional options for homeowners to take eco-friendly living to the next level.

Energy neutral upgrades and products, ranging from awnings to radiant barriers, provide an additional reduction in cooling energy consumption and costs associated with even the most energy-efficient appliances.

According to futurist Mark Justman of Social Technologies, a global research and consulting firm, there is a growing nucleus of homeowners who value ethical consumption, but often consider a big appliance purchase the only solution.

“While investing in an ENERGY STAR appliance or green product is extremely beneficial for energy consumption, there are many additional energy-neutral products that are just as economical,” said Justman. “To top it off, they also have benefits beyond energy efficiency like convenience or aesthetics, making it more of an investment rather than an expense.”

Energy-neutral home solutions that Justman recommends include:

- **Awnings** (www.awningstoday.com/rel/energynutral.htm) – when added above a window or door, an awning reduces the amount of heat that enters a home by blocking the sun’s rays from penetrating the glass. Keeping excess heat out reduces the load on the air conditioner, allowing the unit to cool the space more efficiently.
- **Solar window screens** – screens that install on the outside of windows, allowing protection from the sun’s heat and a little added privacy.
- **Radiant barriers** – structures made of highly reflective material typically installed in attics that reflect radiant heat upward, preventing it from entering the home.

- **Conservation landscaping** – includes planting of shade trees or hedges near a house to block sun from penetrating windows during the summer. Conservation landscaping can also act as a windbreak, protecting homes from icy winds in the winter.
- **Caulking and weather stripping** – when installed around windows, doors and cracks, it reduces air infiltration, keeping cool air in during the summer and out during the winter.
- **Programmable thermostats** – they automatically adjust a home's temperature settings, allowing homeowners to save energy while away or sleeping. Programmable thermostats are better for the environment, since using less energy helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with energy production.

With heating and cooling accounting for about 56 percent of the energy used in a typical U.S. home, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, homeowners are able to utilize energy neutral products to improve their home's energy efficiency.

“Solar radiation through glass is responsible for nearly 20 percent of the load on an air conditioner,” said Michelle Sahlin, managing director of the Professional Awning Manufacturers Association (PAMA www.awningstoday.com/rel/energyneutral.htm).

“Awnings have the ability to limit the sun's rays through glass directly reduces the impact of global warming from greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, if a neighborhood collectively uses awnings, it reduces the overall demand on the energy infrastructure, subsequently preventing black outs.”