



How to Talk About Home Energy Upgrades

A tip sheet for energy auditors

We've done research on what works and what doesn't when conducting a home energy audit. Here are some tips based on our findings:



Engage with homeowners

Tell them something they don't already know. Homeowners like to learn more about their homes. They say the best and most helpful parts of the assessment are often blower door tests, infrared images, and tours of their homes that show areas for improvement. Personalized assessment reports with results specific to their homes are better than generic recommendations.



Listen

Put aside your ideas on what you think would be best for the homeowners and, instead, listen carefully and non-judgmentally to their concerns and priorities. Are they most concerned about costs, or do aesthetics matter more? Are they interested in reducing their energy use, or do they have other reasons for upgrading? Learn their motivations and then tailor your recommendations accordingly.



Discuss more than just money

Consider the nonfinancial benefits. Typically, homeowners say bill savings are the biggest draw for upgrading, but they are often unaware of the comfort, health, and environmental benefits. We found that mentioning specific comfort or health benefits such as fewer cold drafts and less asthma can sometimes be just as motivating as bill savings. Again, find out what matters before recommending anything!



Be friendly and help them through the hassle

Don't just tell homeowners what to do—help them by removing the barriers to upgrading. Sort through the paperwork, help them apply for financing, and set up appointments that are convenient for them. We found that home energy assessors who are enthusiastic, friendly and pleasant, as well as knowledgeable and helpful, are more persuasive than others.



Carefully craft recommendations

Avoid talking about long payback periods, if possible, and instead focus on comfort and health benefits. If you have to talk about payback periods for expensive items, try mentioning a specific month and year rather than years from today. Also, try not to put “no-brainer” items, such as lighting upgrades, on the same list as more substantial upgrades, because the substantial items may seem less appealing in comparison.



Consider groups

Host a home assessment for groups of homeowners to harness the power of social norms to encourage upgrading. Use personally tailored thermal images from specific homes in the group.

Each of these strategies has a small but measurable effect. Good luck!

ACEEE
American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy

To find out more, download the report at aceee.org/research-report/b1701