

In the news

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Picture: Bohdan Warchomij

With the focus on the minimum 6-star energy-efficiency standards for new homes, Summit Homes sales and marketing manager Tim Underwood explores what this development means for Perth's homebuyers

WHAT does the 6-star rating involve? The star rating system is a way of assessing the energy efficiency of homes and the higher the rating, the better.

The minimum rating was set at five stars for some time, but changes to the Building Code effective from today stipulate that all homes must meet a minimum rating of six stars. There is, however, a 12-month transitional period offered by the government.

The introduction of these new standards is an indication that homes will be designed and built with a range of improved features to better energy performance.

The ratings are determined by a number of factors, not just the design and building materials used, but also include climate zones and orientation of the home – generally with north being the best orientation.

There are a number of varied climate zones within WA and each of these zones has an effect on how a home is rated.

How can a home meet the minimum 6-star requirement? There are different ways the requirement can be met, such as orientating the home to maximise solar-passive design, as well as introducing new products, such as improved roof and wall insulation, window sizing on north or south-facing walls, and increasing the overall thermal mass of the building. As a general rule, the main living areas should be positioned to the north with the non-habitable rooms such as the laundry, bathroom and garage, located to the west. Homebuyers should avoid complicated floor plans that increase the external wall area.

What does it mean to have a 6-star home? Building greener homes means their energy use will be less, which has positive implications for both homebuyers and the environment.

Ultimately this means WA homebuyers can save money on their heating and cooling costs as homes stay cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

Our research shows us that with a Summit home, homebuyers can save up to 70 per cent* off their heating and cooling costs. Besides the cost savings, there is also a very real opportunity for WA homebuyers to play an active part in reducing their carbon footprint.

This means that WA homebuyers can live more comfortably and enjoy improved health, as well as increased resilience to climate change, and when selling a home those with a higher star rating should have a higher resale value.

Will the changes to a 6-star rating cost homebuyers more money? Introducing new products can increase a new home's overall price, so our advice to homebuyers is to do their research properly.

This can vary between building sectors. For example, the costs to first homebuyers might be different to those experienced by higher-end builders.

At Summit, we have been planning our 6-star strategy for some time and have undertaken a very thorough audit of building practices, materials and

designs to meet the standard. We have also been negotiating with suppliers to source the materials that we are including in the homes at the best possible price. Because of this, we have chosen to absorb the costs so that Summit Homes clients can receive all the benefits of a 6-star home with no additional expense.

What tips can you offer homebuyers regarding these changes?

The most important advice I can offer is to simply do your homework and make your sales consultant do the work for you. It is also worthwhile to consider the orientation of your lot and remember that different climate zones and orientations will affect the star rating.

Look for a design that maximises energy efficiency. But, at the end of the day, don't forget that buying a new home is an exciting process – have fun and enjoy it!

An energy-efficient home does not mean an ugly home, so you shouldn't have to compromise on design or livability to get there.

* Source: Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (www.nathers.gov.au). Savings are based on the Westport display home in climate region 52 (Swanbourne) and show the heating and cooling cost savings made when compared with a 5-star home.

Perth Metro: 9333 0888
South West: 9722 0300

