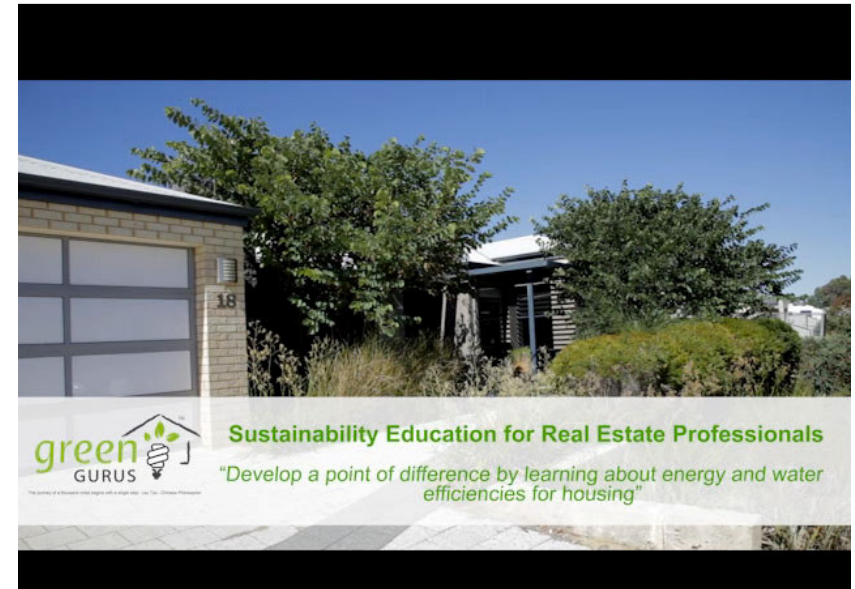


Greening the Real Estate Industry

2011 Update: Identifying the best way to build capacity within the real estate profession to communicate sustainability measures to sellers, buyers, landlords and tenants.

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<http://www.vimeo.com/27484717>

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Funding provided by REIWA has helped subsidise the cost for upto 100 REIWA members to attend.

The Real Estate Business Agents advisory board (REBA) approved the workshops for industry Compulsory Professional Development (CPD) points.

The City of Mandurah and the City of Fremantle have provided strong support for these workshops and their contribution has been gratefully appreciated by the real estate business community and Green Gurus.

Green Gurus would like to thank the many individuals who offered expert advice and feedback leading up to, during and after the workshop. Special thanks to Professor Peter Newman, Colin Ashton-Graham, Gerard Siero and Alex Bruce who gave generously of their time.

Their knowledge and experience of sustainability concepts for residential buildings has helped to deliver credible and meaningful content to real estate professionals in each of the workshops.

Green Gurus would also like to thank the many stakeholders and participants who attended the workshop. Their enthusiasm, insight and feedback has added significant value to each workshop and to this research.

To aide in the sharing and distribution of information on Sustainability, this publication can be quoted or cited freely, however we ask that you make reference to the author of this report.

The views expressed herein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia or Curtin University. Much of the feedback from participants is detailed in this report.

Facilitator



Partner



Financial supporter



Photography: *Front cover* Film on 'Greening the Real Estate Industry', Western Australia

Executive Summary

Real estate agents and property managers are the front line in the housing sector when people are choosing to buy or rent a home and may be *the missing link so far in optimising the flow of information on energy and water efficient homes.*

This is mainly due to a lack of awareness and training in the real estate industry on sustainability practices and concepts for residential property and knowledge of energy and water efficiency products, services and government subsidies that are available.

There has been a lack of engagement with this industry on the topic of sustainability in most Australian states and this report aims to highlight the need for this to change. The real estate industry can help to produce highly significant outcomes for energy and water conservation but will need to be engaged with, trained and supported.

The Australian government have recently released a consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) on Residential Building Mandatory Disclosure (RBMD) which if legislated will require all existing sellers and landlords to provide information to prospective buyer and tenants about energy and water performance. The Federal government has recognised the importance of this information for consumers:

'Consistent information about the energy performance of a home may assist people in selecting a home that is more efficient and therefore potentially more comfortable and cheaper to run and can provide householders with additional information on improvements that could be undertaken to improve a home's energy efficiency... understanding the impact of a home's orientation, or the presence of adequate insulation and double glazing may mean that less energy is required to heat a home to a comfortable level' (DCCEE, 2011).

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

A series of workshops have been developed by Green Gurus in partnership with Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute, aimed to deliver reliable, meaningful and consistent information on sustainability aspects for housing including energy and water efficiencies that help to reduce household costs.

A total of 121 real estate professionals in Western Australia attended the 'Sustainability in WA housing' workshops between May 2010 to May 2011 and the collection of feedback from surveys and interviews conducted with 93 attendees has been summarised in this final report.

The key findings from delivery of the educative workshops include the following:

- 1) *An increase in knowledge and awareness* of the financial and environmental benefits of energy and water efficiencies available for landlords and owners of residential property (it was evident this information was overwhelmingly embraced by participants),
- 2) *Further training and support is required* to build upon knowledge gained and enhance professional skills which will help to overcome information asymmetries¹ and other problems including split incentives²,
- 3) After information has been disseminated *there is a shift to change to more sustainable practices*, at home and within the operation of their businesses, including the services they offer.

¹ Information asymmetries occur when a lack of information and/or an unevenness of that information leads to adverse selection. This can happen when a buyer cannot differentiate between high or low quality goods in a market place at time of purchase (sometimes only recognised after the transaction). High quality products can be driven out of the market place which can lead to sub-optimal market outcomes resulting in a 'market for lemons' (Allen Consulting Group, 2011).

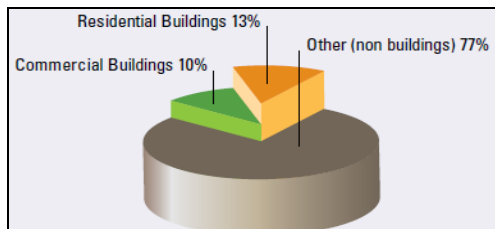
² Split incentives include those between the landlord and tenant, where the costs and benefits of energy efficiency investments go to different parties. Usually the tenant is worst off.

Introduction - Moving housing towards higher efficiencies

In 2010 the Federal Government passed an act to ensure the mandatory disclosure of energy performance in *commercial buildings* at point of sale or lease. This has been flagged to be followed by mandatory disclosure on residential buildings sometime in 2012/2013. The Australian Capital Territory and Queensland have already introduced this disclosure.

The introduction of Residential Building Mandatory Disclosure (RBMD) legislation is seen as a major catalyst to increasing efficiencies in existing residential stock (approx 98% of homes). This may help bring them closer to the efficiencies of newly built homes.

The Council of Australian Government's (COAG) and the Federal government believe this legislation will encourage greater and more significant greenhouse gas reductions in residential buildings which currently accounts to approx 13% of Australian total greenhouse gas emissions.



Australian Greenhouse Gas Emissions from energy consumed within buildings
(Source: *Your Home Design for Lifestyle & the Future: Technical Manual*, DEWHA 2008)

The mandatory disclosure program will also bring Australia alongside other leading countries such as the United Kingdom and America which are making an effort to shift residential building stock towards a sustainable and zero net carbon future.

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

The real estate industry will be vital to the success of such legislation. An independent review of the UK energy performance certificates (EPC) introduced in 2007 for existing residential buildings was conducted by the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC).

The UKERC Report identified that the role of the real estate agent is crucial to the success of mandatory disclosure. The UKERC report further highlighted that, '... many of the energy performance certification (EPC) duties fall on the estate agent whose compliance and practice is therefore very important to the success of the EPC'. This report highlights a need to engage this industry.

'Agents and solicitors are the gatekeepers and interpreters of the EPC. To ensure that these groups understand the aims of the scheme, adopt good practice and support objectives, it is recommended that training needs are researched for these groups and that a package of CPD training is offered'. (UKERC, 2008)

In Australia, a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) has recently been published to inform government, stakeholders and consumers of the implications of Residential Building Mandatory Disclosure (RBMD). This report was prepared by the Allen Consulting Group for the National Framework for Energy Efficiency Building Implementation Committee and identified a significant policy problem requiring resolution, that being 'information asymmetries'.

The Allen report highlighted the unevenness of information being disseminated in the housing market or the lack of it on energy, water and greenhouse gas performance of residential buildings. This is leading to a 'Market Failure' which requires government intervention.

The RIS further suggests that the objectives of the information disclosure for consumers is, ‘...to improve wellbeing and environmental sustainability so long as this intervention is economic welfare enhancing’ (Allen Consulting, 2011). From preliminary findings the report has indicated that, ‘the community would be better off with intervention than without it’ (Allen Consulting, 2011). Importantly, there are a number of options identified in the RIS whereby the benefits of disclosure exceed the costs.

Background - Why engage the real estate industry on Sustainability?

The need to engage the real estate industry on sustainability concepts for housing has become increasingly important as home owners move towards higher energy and water efficiencies which ‘future-proof’ their homes from rising energy and water costs. Many design features and new environmentally sustainable technologies, renewable energy solutions and water management measures which all help to improve the quality, comfort and affordability for householders are not fully understood or promoted by agents. The question of whether real estate agents are ready for this change was the subject of the research included in this report.

Secondly, it is proposed that Residential Building Mandatory Disclosure (RBMD) will require information relating to the energy, water and greenhouse gas performance to be disclosed at point of sale or lease and this is likely to be communicated by the agent to the consumer.

Today, information provided to consumers at point of sale or lease provides little detail on aspects of the home that may distinguish between high and low quality performance (energy, water and greenhouse performance), which can lead to adverse selection in

the market place. This is leading to ‘a market for lemons’ and the driving out of high quality products from the market.

Many participants who attended the workshops have recognised the direct and indirect benefits for householders and society, including electricity, gas and water savings (lower bills), with the seller achieving the potential of a ‘green premium’ and the buyer receiving this wealth transfer and societal benefits of greenhouse gas savings. Indirectly, there is associated health and human comfort benefits from more efficient and better performing homes. Furthermore, consumers are reassured about making the right choices when they buy, sell or lease property.

In most Australia States, regulatory requirements ensure the Continued Professional Development (CPD) of licensed real estate professionals. The CPD training cost is borne by licensed operators as a typical business expense and is seen as a way to enhance the skills and professionalism of sales and property manager representatives. In Western Australia, ten CPD points are required per annum.

Sustainability workshops for the real estate industry

In May 2010, a pilot project was initiated with the real estate industry in Western Australia. This project was developed and facilitated by Chiara Pacifici, Research Associate at the Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute. The Real Estate and Business Agents supervisory board (REBA) approved the workshop as part of compulsory professional development.

The pilot sought to achieve two outcomes: 1) engage and educate real estate professionals in Western Australia on sustainability concepts for housing including energy and water efficiencies; and 2) measure if this education lead participants to take action and implement their new found knowledge, either at home and/or within their business practice.

Due to the positive feedback from attendees and the need to extend the engagement to a greater number of people in the industry, a further three workshops were delivered during August 2010 to October 2010. Topics related to sustainability in housing were delivered by industry experts, academics and officials from the Water Corporation and Office of Energy. Agents received Compulsory Professional Development (CPD) points and a certificate of attendance.

Surveys were developed to ascertain changes in attitudes, perceptions and the level of knowledge on sustainability topics after each workshop. Attendees voluntarily participated in these surveys.

The first report was released to stakeholders in December 2010 detailing the findings from surveys and interviews with 33 real estate professionals including selling agents and property managers. This feedback from participants has remained consistent and the same concerns, barriers, drivers and opportunities are detailed in this report.

The workshops continued into 2011 mainly due to the overwhelming positive response from attendees, support from the Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA) and a number of local Councils, as well as growing demand by others in the industry for relevant, meaningful and credible information on sustainability concepts for housing.

The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA) partnered with Green Gurus to deliver these workshops to their members from September and provided funding to help subsidise the cost for upto 100 member agents to attend. It should be noted that REIWA have shown great leadership to their members by supporting and encouraging them to attend these workshops, with many agents appreciating this support in writing.

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

Through this partnership, licensed professionals were able to receive seven Compulsory Professional Development (CPD) points. The increase in CPD points has helped reward agents who attend the full day with the maximum points being attributed to attendees. This occurred mainly due to acknowledgement of the feedback received by earlier participants who requested a greater number of points. Furthermore, many participants were thankful the workshop was available and was seen as a fresh and innovative training option, aimed not only to enhance their professional skills but also to assist them in developing a 'point of difference' to their agency.

“Clearly, education of the wider public is critical to the process of improving the design features of houses and changing lifestyles to reduce the carbon footprint within the urban environment. I am not sure that real estate agents are going to be the best, or even adequate messengers but they certainly need to be better informed than they are”. Participant



October 2010, Perth, 'Sustainability in WA Housing' Workshop

Methodology

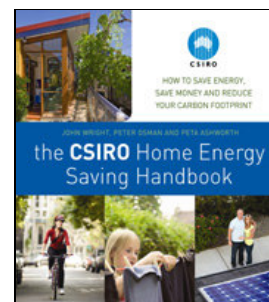
A total of 121 real estate professionals attended the 'Sustainability in WA Housing' workshops delivered in metropolitan and regional areas. These eight workshops were facilitated by Green Gurus in partnership with the Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute and REIWA between May 2010 and May 2011.

To assess the perceptions, attitudes and the level of knowledge real estate professionals held on topics relating to energy and water efficiency and sustainability in residential buildings, attendees were invited to participate in a written survey after each workshop. Of those who attended, 93 participated in the surveys which were completed at the end of each session.

Interviews are currently being conducted with randomly chosen agents to identify if changes have been enacted at home and within their business practice since attending the educative workshops. Results from these surveys are yet to be completed. However, preliminary feedback has shown that participants have an increased confidence to talk about sustainability aspects in the property they are selling or leasing since attending the workshop and are adopting the information in marketing material and information articles within their newsletter feeds to clientele.

Participants were provided with resources that included the CSIRO Home Energy Saving Handbook, brochures and information leaflets on water and energy efficiency developed by the Water Corporation and the Office of Energy (WA), links to on-line resources, information brochures and local examples of innovative green buildings. Much of this information could be accessed electronically. Agents were also able to download the power point slides and information sheets provided by each of the presenters from the Green Gurus website at no cost.

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici



Authors: John Wright, Peter Osmon and Peta Ashworth, CSIRO, 2009

Content delivered in Workshops

The aim of the educative process was to increase awareness and understanding by participants about sustainable building design, energy and water efficiency in buildings, government sustainability initiatives including rebates for residential housing, efficiency of appliances, clean energy options including small scale renewable energy generation (solar PV and wind) and sustainable lifestyles.

Content also focused on how these aspects relate to energy and water reduction and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in residential buildings. Further topics included:

- *Demand* from householders for energy & water efficient products to reduce utility costs,
- *Behaviour change* case studies that show concerns and attitudes to Climate Change/ Environment/ Energy and Water use and barriers experienced by consumers,
- Government *subsidies and rebates* that can help reduce the upfront cost for homeowners and tenants,
- Star ratings for NEW buildings and other related *legislation changes and government initiatives* that encourage sustainable living.

The content was developed by Green Gurus in consultation with leading sustainability experts, academics, government departments and property experts.

Presenters

Several prominent speakers provided meaningful, credible and relevant information on sustainability in housing. These experts included:

- Professor Peter Newman - Director at Curtin University Sustainability Policy (CUSP) Institute, a member of the Advisory Council on Infrastructure Australia and one of Australia's leading sustainability academics,
- Colin Ashton-Graham - a behavioural economist and pioneer in household behaviour change concepts,
- Gerard Siero - an Ecological Architect and a corporate member of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects,
- Alex Bruce - a sustainable energy engineer, specialist in life cycle analysis (LCA) and small scale renewable energy systems including solar PV,
- Chiara Pacifici - Licensed real estate agent, founder of Green Gurus, accredited Home Sustainability Assessor and Research Associate at the CUSP Institute.

Government officials and sustainability officers from a variety of government departments have delivered information and include:

- Building Commission
- Water Authority
- Western Power
- Office of Energy

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

A number of guest speakers were invited to participate and deliver content at each of the workshops. A number of venues were at 'Sustainable Star Rated' homes throughout the Metropolitan area and tours of the property were conducted by industry specialists. These specialists included:

- Paul Hart – Solar Gain
- Alex Hyndmen – City of Fremantle
- Daniel Smee – Jade projects (Green building company)
- Natalie Scott – Ecostar Consulting – ABSA accredited Building Thermal Performance NatHERS Home Energy Rating assessor
- Eddie Roe – True North consulting – ABSA accredited Building Thermal Performance NatHERS Home Energy Rating assessor

***“I found the Sustainability workshop conducted by Green Gurus, CUSP Institute and presenters to be informative and educational. It has offered me a unique insight into future changes that are likely to affect our industry”.** Participant, workshop 2*



**Square One - 14 Money Street, Perth
Master Builders Award 2010 for
Energy Efficiency and Sustainability**

Survey Questions

Qualitative and quantitative data retrieved through surveys and subsequent follow-up interviews were developed by the CUSP Institute and were designed to ascertain the level of knowledge, perception, attitudes and sentiment held by agents who attended the workshop.

A series of discerning questions relating to the participants current knowledge of environmental issues, attitudes and perceptions on sustainability and whether they experienced demand from clientele for sustainable features were included in the written survey. Survey questions changed for each workshop to reflect the feedback from participants which helped to continuously improve the research data.

Interviews are currently being conducted with randomly chosen agents to identify if changes have been enacted at home and within their business practice since attending the educative workshops. Results from these surveys are yet to be completed.

Response Rate

Table 1 identifies the response rates for the number of real estate professionals to each of the workshops including the number of REIWA member agents and the number of participants who completed the written survey.

Table 1 – Response Rate

Month	Number REIWA member agents	Number non-member agents	TOTAL ATTENDEES	Survey participants
May 2010	11	0	11	9
Aug 2010	5	0	5	5
Sept 2010	8	0	8	3
Oct 2010	22	0	22	14
Jan 2011	7	1	8	6
Feb 2011	9	0	9	6
Apr 2011	16	3	19	17
May 2011	32	7	39	33
TOTAL	110	11	121	93

List of Statements

Table 2 shows a number of questions used in the survey. Participants were asked to rank them from 1 being least agreeable to 7 where they strongly agreed with the statement. The majority of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

Table 2 – List of Statements

List of Statements	Agree/Strongly Agree
This workshop is relevant to the real estate industry	82%
I am now well informed about sustainability including; energy efficiencies, water-wise options and renewable energy for housing	93%
I now believe energy and water efficiency is crucial for the longevity of existing housing stock	81%
I know more about the topics presented now than I did before the workshop	93%
I can use the information gained in this workshop to add-value and better represent the properties I sell or lease	80%
It is the role of real estate agent and property manager to inform buyers, sellers, landlords and tenants about sustainable features that are implemented in a home	75%
Energy and water issues are important to tackle now	95%
I have experienced demand from buyers/ renters looking for a home with sustainability features/ improvements	24%
Climate Change is an important issue for Australia and the World	88%
A sustainability (energy performance) rating will have an impact on the sale price or rental value of a property	75%
A sustainable environment or community is more important than a sustainable economy	55%
Sustainability in Housing means that use of water, energy and waste is minimised through efficiency and passive solar design principles	94%
Enhanced thermal performance of the building envelope, (both in terms of improved insulation and air-tight construction) plays a key role in minimising energy use for heating and cooling	97%
Use of electricity within the home is dependant on its occupants	85%

Key Findings

Barriers

A number of barriers were identified by participants on the relationship between sustainability and residential housing. These barriers could limit or prohibit their ability or desire to implement sustainability in their practice and business operations. The main barriers are identified below:

- Lack of knowledge
- Costs vs. Benefit
- Time prohibitive
- Issues of materiality- Is it worth it?
- Payback periods of investment
- Effect of EE on house \$price
- Regulatory obligations for MD
- Marketability- Marketing choices
- No incentive to change BAU
- MD may not be legislated
- lack of media coverage/awareness

Drivers

Real estate professionals were asked what would be the likely drivers that would help them embrace and act on the information they learned during the workshop. The following outlines key drivers identified by participants:

- Increased competitive advantage
- Preparedness for change
- Risk management
- Develop and maintain 'green' corporate image
- Realise 1st mover advantage
- Build key partnerships with clientele including developers
- Make a difference - reduce environmental impact

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

Opportunities

The opportunities identified by real estate participants were extensive. The majority highlighted the benefits of communicating and disseminating accurate and reliable information to their clientele. The majority of agents found it would be a strong way to differentiate them from their competitors. Participants highlighted the following opportunities:

- Point of difference: both for the properties they sell or rent and the agent/ agency
- Added value to property
- Unique marketing opportunities
- Competitive edge in the industry
- Develop new partnerships
- Developing new business practices
- Build industry support for change
- Possible Tax incentives for energy efficiency investment
- Incentivise Best Practice - Awards based reward for innovators and leaders (Green Stamp Initiative)

Concerns

Real estate participants expressed a number of concerns which were identified in surveys and in follow-up interviews. The main concerns include:

- How will MD affect sales/ leasing
- What will the role be for sales agents/ property managers
- What costs are likely to be incurred by homeowners to help improve the energy/ sustainability rating of the home
- What support and training will be provided to the industry
- How will MD effect low-income earners and housing affordability

Feedback

“This is only going to become a bigger issue for us all and certainly within Real Estate we are going to see more and more significance placed on the subject as it impacts the marketing and sale of properties” Participant

“Buyers are now far more selective and points of difference far more important. Additionally, we are dealing with buyers that are more informed – they know a lot more”. Participant

“Thank you once again for opening my eyes on this amazing topic, a few of us were chatting outside and all agreed it was without question the best CPD point event we have attended!” Participant

“The presenters were of an extremely high caliber. Having such highly qualified professionals and academics sharing their knowledge highlighted both the relevance and importance of sustainability to our Real Estate industry”. Participant

“It was interesting to hear of the upcoming changes to the national housing energy schemes and the steps taken in the eastern states to provide the public with an insight into the sustainability of homes for rent and sale.” Participant

“I learnt a lot from the content and was indeed motivated to set out to learn more! I almost had pangs of regret being out of the design profession and felt an urgent need to do my bit to educate and inform the public” Participant



Jade 909, 9 Star Home – Partnership between Jade Projects Pty Ltd, Think Brick and Right Homes. Winner of the 2010 HIA Green Smart Home of the Year

“The workshop certainly made a big contribution to my knowledge and my motivation to go forward, learn more and deliver to my clients more effectively” Participant

“The course itself offered the opportunity to rub shoulders with practitioners at the cutting edge of technology and intelligent thought which was a revelation to all agents who attended” Participant

“Within my current position as property manager, I have had a number of comments and complaints from tenants wanting more efficient air conditioners/ hot water systems and insulation” Participant

Conclusions

National Energy Efficiency Education workshops specifically designed for the real estate industry will provide highly significant outcomes including an increase in knowledge, understanding and communication within the industry which will have flow on effects for the community.

It is assumed that a higher efficient home will achieve a higher value, not only because of the capital investment of the environmentally sustainable improvements, but also because of the reduced need for energy and water required to fulfill the needs of the occupants. Therefore utility bills would be lowered due to this investment. It is probable that a degree of prestige is rapidly becoming associated with more sustainable homes.

Agents who have attended these workshops agree that the content delivered to them exceeded expectation and gave them a more holistic understanding of sustainability in housing. The feedback received from around 100 attendees has confirmed the need to continue this engagement and provide further educative workshops for the industry nationwide. Feedback from participants has provided an insight into the level of understanding held by real estate agents on sustainability concepts in housing, how they perceive sustainability and how it relates to them and their businesses and what their overall sentiment and concerns are on the topic.

Real estate professionals are able to identify cost savings including subsidies available for the properties they manage/sell and communicate these to their client. They have also started to include sustainability information in their marketing material to promote the green credentials of the properties they are selling. And most remarkably, some agents are simply providing action based information such as 'top 10 ways to reduce energy use' and 'Energy Action Plans' to the greater community.

This information is obtained from credible sources such as government departments due to the quality of information disseminated in the workshops.

Without doubt, real estate agents and property managers are the front line in the housing sector when people are choosing to buy or rent a home and are the missing link so far in optimising the flow of information on energy and water efficient homes.

Participating agents in this study have confirmed that *marketing strategies* which highlight the benefits of sustainability concepts, products and their services will be paramount to increasing demand for them.

The majority of participants agreed that this *increase in demand will likely lower the cost* of energy and water efficient products and services in both new and existing homes, making it more affordable for householders to implement sustainable features.

The cost of this supply is one of the main barriers identified by agents to incorporating sustainable technologies and products, and agents agree that *government initiatives and subsidies* will also help make retrofitting homes more affordable. The surveys have identified a *desire by agents for knowledge on sustainability concepts in housing* which will help them provide accurate and meaningful information to their clientele.

Demand for more *specific information on sustainability* in housing by participants was strongly outlined. It is evident from feedback that the *education of real estate professionals is paramount* to the success of the introduction of mandatory disclosure legislation.

One of the most significant findings was the *shift in opinion and perception* after information was disseminated to real estate professionals.

Recommendations

This report highlights a need for training, support and government funding to roll out National Education Workshops designed to better inform and prepare the real estate industry for a shift towards a low-carbon future.

Real estate professionals could provide long term benefits for the community by significantly optimising consumer awareness on aspects of sustainability. Currently it is not the role of the agent to do so however RBMD will change this.

The majority of agents who participated in this study were inspired by the many benefits and advantages that can be gained from incorporating sustainability in both their businesses and at home. Many of the participants have started to act on the information received at the workshop.

It is therefore recommended that a national program of workshops on sustainability in housing for real estate agents be instituted to enable a similar process of engagement to the West Australian pilot program.

"I believe that in our duty of care and professional responsibility, we as agents are going to have to be far better informed about sustainability measures for housing and far more capable of talking to buyers and sellers about the respective merits (or not) of the properties that are sold or bought".
Participant

Greening the Real Estate Industry – Chiara Pacifici

Sustainability talks for agents

VANESSA WILLIAMS
Leading sustainability experts will address a series of green workshops this year which will target the real estate industry.

They aim to give real estate agents and property managers a better understanding of sustainability in housing and how it can benefit sellers, buyers, landlords and tenants.

Curtin University Sustainability Policy Institute, in collaboration with Green Gurus, developed the workshops, which are the first of their kind in Australia.

Among the key speakers at the workshops are Curtin University professor of sustainability Peter Newman, sustainability consultant Alex Bruce, ecological designer Gerard Siero and behavioural economist Colin Ashton-Graham.

GUSP Institute research associate Chiara Pacifici is a key organiser of the workshops and has worked in the real estate industry for 15 years.

Recently completing her masters in sustainability studies, Miss Pacifici hopes the workshops will address a "dire need for the real estate industry to be educated on sustainability in housing".

"Real estate agents are important conduits between the buyer and seller and landlord and tenant and these workshops that we're conducting are also a way to help prepare the industry for potential changes," she said.

Recent research by the institute revealed more than 80 per cent of real estate agents invited to attend pilot workshops in May agreed the content gave them a "holistic understanding of sustainability in housing".

But as Australia shifts towards a low-carbon future and households foot the bill for rising energy costs, Miss Pacifici believes there is an even greater need to improve energy efficiency in homes.

"We need to focus on energy efficiency in existing residential stock," she said.

Professor Newman commended Miss Pacifici's work and said her experience as a real estate agent meant she could "speak their language".

"I think it's great that sustainability is reaching into every corner of the marketplace and this is one area that needs it as well," he said.

Real Estate Institute of WA



Rainwater tanks are a good option.

president Alan Bourke said Australia needed to catch up with other developed nations which were well ahead in terms of sustainability.

"We need to transition to a greater use of greywater, solar panels, rainwater tanks, native plants and so on," he said. "These things cannot be done quickly but there is real enthusiasm for many people in the community, including sections of the industry, to start getting serious about it and progressing it in a positive way with rewards-based incentive."

Mr Bourke is encouraging real estate agents and property managers to attend the workshops, which he said were pivotal for the industry to grasp a clear understanding of sustainability in housing.

"These workshops illustrate the way in which consumers are being nudged into more resource-efficient habits but also the way in which the industry is responding to consumer demands and expectations around sustainable living," he said.

A workshop will be held at the Wollaston Conference Centre on Wollaston Road in Mt Claremont on October 28 from 10am-4pm.

REIWA is offering its members a 25 per cent subsidy to attend.

For more details or to make a booking, call Chiara Pacifici on 9266 9030 or email cpacifici@curtin.edu.au.

Industry given green light

■ Louise Baxter

Perth sustainability education company is helping to "green" the real estate industry by holding workshops for agents on sustainability measures for residential property.

In collaboration with REIWA, Green Gurus is aiming to bridge the flow of information to buyers, sellers, property owners and tenants, about energy and water efficiency products, services and available government subsidies.

With the State Government-supported mandatory disclosure initiative proposed to be introduced in 2012-13, sustainability concepts would soon be an issue for everyone involved in home buying, which was why real-estate professionals needed education now, Green Gurus founder Chiara Pacifici said.

Ms Pacifici, a former real estate agent, said mandatory disclosure would require every property to have a certificate identifying the energy performance of the building upon sale or lease, to inform consumers about the energy and water efficiencies of the home.

"Mandatory disclosure will inform consumers about the likely energy and water efficiency of a house. For example, does it have insulation? Are the light fittings efficient or old technology," she said.

"It is important for real estate professionals to understand so they can value-add during an appraisal — for say, a rainwater tank — and avoid giving misleading information."

This training would benefit agents and property managers by giving them a marketing edge, preparation for policy changes and better knowledge to serve their clients.

Since the program started in May last year, 122 agents had attended and feedback had been positive, she said.

One participant said: "This is only going to become a bigger issue for us all and certainly within real estate we are going to see more and more significance on the subject as it impacts the marketing and sale of properties."

Queensland and the ACT have already implemented mandatory disclosure but WA is the only State conducting such training.

For more information about mandatory disclosure, visit greengurus.com.au.

'Does it have insulation? Are the light fittings efficient or old technology?'