

Helping builders on the path to being green

Miles Dyson wants to set aside confusion about today's most popular building trend

Featured inspector: Miles Dyson

BY BETHANY CONWAY

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As more and more builders in Las Cruces focus on building certified green homes, inspector Miles Dyson will be there to help them navigate the process.

A certified Home Energy Rating Systems (HERS) program rater, National Association of Home Builders green verifier and a green rater for the Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) program, Dyson knows the ins and outs of green building and is excited to share the possibilities with everyone.

"Building green isn't all solar and planting plants on your roof," Dyson said. "It's a lot of good, basic building science that can be pretty easily incorporated into a project."

Originally from Roswell, he received his bachelor's degree in agriculture business management and master's degree in economics from New Mexico State University, later working for Dairy Farmers of America.

"I was a quality manager and production manager," he said. "I was there for 16 years and was looking for something different, something that was going to involve fewer moving parts."

In late 2006, he began his own home inspection business and was soon interested in the growing trend of green.

"Doing the home inspections, you get to see what's out there, and you realize that there are a lot of better options available than what we are doing in homes," he said. "The more I learned about it, the more I learned there are some simple things we need to be doing in a lot of our homes that are going to make the home a lot easier to live in, decrease your energy bills and make the house last longer."

It was then that he began training to help the builders around him reach their green-building goals. Creating Inspection Connection LC Home Inspections and Energy Rating Services, he was soon helping builders he sees as "the crème of the crop" reach their intended certification, be it Build Green New Mexico (BGNM), Energy Star or LEED.

While the definition of green is not set in stone, Dyson said he does what he can to help builders and homeowners understand what this type of building involves – something that many people still find confusing.

"It hasn't hit our area yet," he said.

"Even in Santa Fe, where the green building movement is more mature, there is still an extreme amount of confusion about what all is involved in it because there are so many different ways that a home or a project can be green."

According to Dyson, there are some things that will always be certain about a green-built home.

"It is going to be a home that uses less energy than a standard home, lasts longer than a standard home, is more comfortable and easier to live in because of improved indoor-air quality, and it should use fewer resources during construction and fewer energy and water resources through the years," he said.

With more and more homes being constructed BGNM, Energy Star and LEED certified, he said the definition of green building is becoming more and more concrete.

"Working within one of these programs gives a project credibility in that it has followed a set standard, and it can be compared to a home in New York or Utah that has adopted these same standards," he said. "That gives us some

consistency and helps us define what green is. It's based on the beholder a lot of times, but we do have these programs that are set up to clarify it so that it is easy to map your way through it."

When it comes to working with local builders, Dyson helps them understand what programs are available and how they can participate.

"In many cases, I see that a lot of builders are already doing a lot of the things necessary, but they haven't adopted a formalized program," he said. "Once I can sit down and share that with them, then they're on board and they are ready to go.

"We've got these great tax credits available, either from the federal government or from the state, that make it really worth their time to do these things."

Dyson is brought in during the planning stages of the project and creates a model of the project using his software in order to explore things like the types of walls, orientation of the home and the type of HVAC system it will have. He then gives an initial HERS rating from zero to 100 – a 100 is a home that just meets current energy codes.

"After we get that preliminary rating – depending on which program we are working in – we start to look at what changes we would have to make to improve it to meet the standards of the program," he said. Tweaks can include anything from radiant-barrier paint, which helps break up the radiation coming into the house and reflects it back out so that it never gets into the living space, to Low-E windows and expanding spray foam.

"In addition to the energy-efficiency section, we also look at things like water efficiency, materials and resource management, global impact, location and linkages and site sustainability," he said.

Through third-party inspections like framing checks, insulation checks and ductwork checks, Dyson makes sure all of the things that were planned for the home are implemented.

"After that is all satisfied, we will go forward and complete the project, and then we will come and do a final insulation check," he said.

This includes checking all the appliances and performing a Blower Door test.

"Then we know what the home's overall efficiency is, and we plug that into whichever program we are planning to participate in – Energy Star, Build Green New Mexico, LEED," he said.

Along with a continuation of green building in new construction, he said the next push nationally will be a focus on existing homes.

"Existing homes are the ultimate green project because we are about saving resources," he said.

"The average home in the country has a HERS rate of around 125 to 150. I think we are going to see the implementation of a lot of programs that will help homeowners improve the efficiency of their homes."

He is currently working with Kevin McGinley of McGinley Construction to renovate a home from 1908 up to BGNM silver certification.

"It's going to be a neat project. We've already done a preliminary energy rating on it to see where it's going to be once they complete all the changes. It's going to be around a HERS 70, which is pretty remarkable," he said. "We are going to make it comparable to any new home in town."

According to Dyson, he is the only certified HERS rater in Las Cruces, and in the future as the housing market begins to pick back up he looks forward to helping more builders as they head down the green path.

"I'd like to just continue to help builders," he said. "I want to convince builders of the value of going beyond Energy Star certification."