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Preferred Suppliers Make your Life Easier!

special report:

Australian Government's Green Loans Program

We have had a lot of interest and comments about the Australian government's home sustainability assessment program Green Loans, yet some building managers and bodies corporate are still sceptical about the value and the benefit of the program. The value proposition is education.

You might be wondering how this benefits a building as a whole? It is education at the home level. If owners and occupiers are educated about efficiency in the home this has a flow on effect for the building as a whole. The positive upside is that the owners or tenants are being educated at no cost to the body corporate or building and the individual owners or tenants are receiving a benefit.

In previous articles we have written about *Demand Side Management* and how your building can save money and reduce its demand for energy. One of the biggest barriers to implementing DSM initiatives is lack of knowledge or understanding of what is involved or how it is achieved. Maybe this is a program that can bring individuals up to speed so they can look at the holistic approach.

So what is the program and how does it benefit the owners or tenants?

It is a free Australian government program run by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. Through the *Green Loans Program*, unit owners and occupiers receive a free, comprehensive home sustainability assessment that will help to reduce their energy and water bills, increase the comfort of their homes and help reduce carbon emissions. This independent assessment is done by a trained and qualified assessor and the report will comprise advice ranging from the smallest behaviour change to major investments such as a solar hot water system or photovoltaic panels. After the assessment has been completed, the owner or occupier can obtain a \$10,000 interest-free loan for sustainability purposes if desired.

What is involved?

The assessment involves the inspection of major energy and water systems relating to thermal comfort, water heating, lighting, refrigeration, cooking, entertainment, water efficiency and outdoor consumption and waste management. The data is entered into a sophisticated assessment software tool to allow environmental impact calculations. The data is then processed by the government department's *Green Loans* section and then a report is sent to the household with recommendations.

This program is also considered a tool the Australian government is using to collect valuable data on how Australian households are consuming energy, water and generating waste. It is a snapshot of where we stand today. If the Australian government is to implement any strategies, there needs to be measurement on how effective a strategy has been, as with any auditing process. The data is essential for the development of strategies for carbon emission reduction and planning of our nation's energy policies.

Warning! If you are going to grant access to assessors or to an organisation to perform these assessments on your site or in your household please follow a few tips to make sure the assessment is done properly. There are plenty of assessors out there and they do vary in expertise and qualifications. A suggestion is that you have one pre-qualified assessor or organisation and give them exclusivity to your site. This reduces the risk of your owners or tenants being led up the garden path.

Here are some checks you need to do to make sure the assessor or organisation that is performing the assessments is legitimate.

- Check that the assessor is wearing the Australian sustainability assessor ID badge. All registered assessors have ID badges.
- Make sure the assessors that enter your site are *qualified* and *registered* with the Australian government. Ask to see the registration.

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- Make sure the organisation you use has experience in this field and the organisation is not just using this as entry on site to promote other products.
- Assessors are not allowed to promote third party products while carrying out assessments. Make this quite clear to any assessor and to your owners or tenants. Warn assessors and their organisations that you will enforce this.
- Check that assessments have been completed on site.

We have heard of cases that assessors are let into buildings and when in the front door they are trying to sell things like vacuum cleaners, hot water systems, insulation bats and even mobile phones. This is definitely not allowed as the assessors are on the government's time and all assessors are advised of this in day one of their training from the government. Report any of this activity by calling 1800 895 076.

If you follow a few simple checks your building will receive real benefits and the individual tenants will as well.

For further information on the program go to the website <http://www.environment.gov.au/greenloans/>

By Michael Newton - Watt Utilities