

NAHB Newsletter:

Alaska home builder Jack Hebert told Congress on Feb. 13 that the housing industry is committed to implementing green building techniques that reduce energy consumption in both new and existing homes, improve indoor and outdoor air quality and conserve water and natural resources.

“Energy efficiency is the primary focus for many builders and home buyers,” Hebert, president and CEO of Cold Climate Housing Research Center based in Fairbanks, Alaska, told members of the Senate Subcommittee on Energy.

Hebert, who serves as an NAHB national representative, said that the nation’s home builders support green building and energy efficiency legislation that is voluntary, market-driven and cost-effective for builders and consumers.

Recognizing that approaches to green building need to distinguish among the regional differences around the U.S., NAHB in 2005 launched its Model Green Home Building Guidelines as an alternative to green building mandates. The guidelines were developed with input from more than 60 industry stakeholders — including builders, researchers, manufacturers, environmentalists and government agencies.

“The guidelines embody the flexibility that builders need to achieve efficiency and conservation goals without meeting costly national or statewide mandates,” said Hebert.

Local adoption of the guidelines allows builders to better address regional and local environmental concerns, to assess life-cycle costs based on local building codes and climate zones, and to encourage innovation to meet higher and broader energy efficiency objectives.

“Simply, there is no one size fits all green building standard,” said Hebert. “Alaska, North Dakota, Florida and Maine all have different efficiency needs and requirements based on their climate. Solar panels don’t work in Fairbanks like they do in Miami. Only flexible, locally grown green building programs can adequately take local issues, architecture, weather and geographic differences into account.”

Stating that the U.S. Green Building Council’s “Leadership in Energy Efficient Design” certification pilot program for single-family homes (LEED-H) would have a drastic effect on the affordability of housing, Hebert noted that this program is “costly, requires many unnecessary mandatory provisions, offers little flexibility and contains extensive implementation fees that could cost a builder, and ultimately the home buyer, from \$12,000 to \$15,000 extra per home.”

NAHB has submitted its guidelines to the American National Standards Institute's development process, with the goal of offering local jurisdictions an “off-the-shelf” green building program that is consensus-based and truly green, but flexible, he said.

Extending and expanding the tax incentives in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 would also help encourage energy efficiency in housing, he said.

“Unlike spending programs or one-size-fits-all rules, tax provisions allow market participants — builders, home owners and home buyers — to marry the energy incentives with market-determined supply and demand,” said Hebert