

HEADLINE: Green Practices For Realtors

It is fall, and elections are in the air. North and south of the border, it's difficult to turn on the television without seeing a candidate discuss their stance on issues. For anyone whose business involves consultation with the public, and advising individuals on business transactions, the ability to tap into a general sense of the important issues of the day is a vital one. Especially in a business like real estate, where people make decisions about large and momentous transactions, when an outside advisor can place the entire deal in a larger context that aligns with the values of the times it goes a long way towards buttressing the confidence of the parties involved.

Case in point: it is impossible to watch election coverage, Canadian or American, and not pick up on the prevalence of environmental concerns. There isn't a single major candidate on the continent who isn't giving serious airtime and discussion to this subject, and opinion polls indicate that, especially in Canada, environmental concerns rank high on the list of issues that voters care about. These same voters are also buyers and sellers, and potential clients.

One of the jurisdictions furthest ahead on this curve in Canada is British Columbia, whose Liberal government recently introduced the first carbon tax in the country. Cognizant of the raised environmental awareness in their market, the Victoria Real Estate Board aims to be the first board in Canada whose members are all NAGAB certified. Given the raised profile of environmental concerns, the Board has introduced three initiatives. "First, we established a Green Task Force at our real estate board. The mandate was to focus on educating our members and finding resources to assist in that area. We then found an online course through NAGAB that we could offer to our members. As a board, we are subsidizing the cost of the course as a way of encouraging interest in becoming accredited as a Greenagent or Greenbroker through NAGAB," says Tony Joe, President of the Victoria Real Estate Board. "And finally, we started to talk to local developers who were employing green building standards so that we could learn more about the market place and what the construction industry was starting to adopt in terms of their own practices. Part of that practical learning experience was to order an energy audit on our Board building. I also invited an energy consultant to conduct an audit of my own residence so I could get a sense first-hand of what an audit looked like."

The utility of energy audits and home inspections isn't limited to British Columbia – the Ontario Ministry of the Environment has recently funded NAGAB to help provide information to Realtors in the province via NAGAB's Realtor Energy Conservation Kit. The initiative is part of the Community Go Green Fund. "The goal of the CGGF program is to engage individuals and communities in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions which helps Ontario achieve its greenhouse gas emission reduction targets (six per cent below 1990 levels by 2014)," says Robert Musgrove, Program Evaluation/Business Review Coordinator at the Ministry of Environment. The Kit offers Realtors a great opportunity to provide their clients with services that extend beyond closing deals. "Buyers are excited about their new purchases and would be receptive to information that would help them to save energy while cutting down expenses. The motivation for a homeowner to make energy-efficient, energy conservation improvements peaks when the homebuyer initially moves into their new or resale home."

The Kit was developed with Realtors and home buyers in mind. "It has been designed to be provided by Realtors to home owners as a way of conveying information about tips they can implement in their homes save energy," says Jennifer Sikic, instructional designer for NAGAB. "It also provides information on rebates that are available through the provincial and federal government for replacing things like toilets and hot water heaters, along with other grants that are available to them." It also provides a useful room-by-room checklist for Realtors which allow them to evaluate a home's energy efficiency. "It lets them have a snapshot of the energy use in the home and where they can make changes."

In all, the opportunities for Green Agents and Brokers to provide valuable environmental

information to their clients is continually expanding, and has never been timelier. For more information, visit www.nagab.org online.