

Indoor airPLUS 101 - Webinar Transcript

Moderator: Michele Curreri
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Michele Curreri: Good morning, everyone. My name is Michele Curreri. I'm with EPA's Indoor airPLUS Program. Thank you so much for joining us today for a brief webinar that we'll provide you with an overview of the Indoor airPLUS Program, including the value of building Indoor airPLUS Qualified Homes and an introduction to the construction specifications.

We are very excited that you could participate and we look forward to interacting with you today. I'd like to go ahead and turn over the controls to our speaker today, Mert Oktem.

Mert Oktem: Thanks, Michele. Hello everyone and welcome again to the Indoor airPLUS 101 webinar. My name is Mert Oktem. I'm a former builder and a general contractor. Currently I work for the Cadmus Group and we support EPA's Indoor Environment's Division.

I'm going to go over the agenda with you real quickly. We are going to talk about the definition of Indoor airPLUS first, then dive in to the construction specifications, we're going to look at the consumers' perspectives and why consumers buy Indoor airPLUS, the value of being an Indoor airPLUS partner, steps to building at Indoor airPLUS Home, and finally the available support.

So, before I dive into this presentation, I would like to answer the question that I bet most of you want to know here today and that is, "What's in it for me?" Well I personally know that these are challenging times for builders out there as well as raters.

So they really are interested in knowing what's going to help them sell more houses, and for raters and providers, what's going to help their builders to sell more houses. And that's exactly what we will be talking about today.

After many years of research and with significant input from stakeholders, based on best available science and balance of practical issues of cost, EPA developed a label that is "Indoor airPLUS" to recognize new homes equipped with a set of comprehensive Indoor Air Quality features.

So we will be talking about a very tangible thing today that is “a label.” So for a minimal increase in cost and home building efforts, add a nationally recognized and a reputable label so you can offer homes with features that help improve Indoor Air Quality.

So this label goes right next to your ENERGY STAR label in the home, so when buyers come and walk through the house, they will see the ENERGY STAR label and then the Indoor airPLUS label right next to it.

So right then, they see that you not only focused on the energy efficiency but also on the Indoor Air Quality, therefore their health. And I would like to share a quote from one of our current Indoor airPLUS partners, Dave Griffin Senior Vice President of Kettler Forlines Homes.

He said, “We started looking at Indoor airPLUS and realized we were already doing most of the checklist.” And I wouldn’t be surprised if by the end of today’s webinar and once you join the program, most of you on the phone will agree with this statement.

So why does Indoor Air Quality matter? Well, we spend about 90 percent or more of our time indoors. So that means that the air that we breathe is, is the air that’s inside the buildings so that’s why it’s important. And when home owners think of their homes, they think of a safe place for their kids, for their families for themselves. But, is it really safe?

Well what they don’t know is actually the quality of air indoors is not better than outdoors, it’s actually worse. In fact, EPA estimates that indoor pollutant levels may be two to five times higher than outdoors.

Now imagine how safe that is. There are many sources of indoor air pollution in homes and some of the examples are combustible sources such oil, gas, kerosene, coal, wood and tobacco products, cabinetry or furniture made of certain pressed wood products, central heating and cooling systems and outdoor sources such as radon and pesticides.

So, what do these sources do? Well, they impact human health and they cause a host of health problems including eye irritation, allergies, headaches and respiratory problems such as asthma.

Indoor contaminants such as dust mites, molds, cockroaches, pet dander, second-hand smoke, and some chemicals can trigger asthma attacks. And why is that important? Well that’s important because your consumers out there have people in their families who have

been diagnosed with asthma, and that is a real problem. In fact, an average of one out of every 10 school aged children has asthma, and these are your potential home buyers.

Another major issue is radon. I'm sure many of you are familiar with this problem. And EPA estimates that about 20,000 lung cancer deaths each year in the U.S. are radon-related. I think that's a very significant number.

So as builders and professionals out there, what can we do about this? Well our answer is, start buy building Indoor airPLUS Homes.

This is a rapidly expanding program with over 700 partners, who have built homes with features that reduce or prevent pollutants that can affect health. Some highlights of the label; it's a Gold Standard for Indoor Air Quality and a nationally recognized label, best construction practices paired with up-to-date technologies, quality assurance to a healthier indoor environment for consumers, and as many of you know, Indoor Air Quality is also having a sizeable financial impact on the home building industry.

Litigation associated with mold and other Indoor Air Quality related concerns and the rising cost of liability coverage, have cost builders across the country billions of dollars. So this program is also a quality assurance for builders using a third-party verifier.

So now I would like to go over the construction specifications with you, talking about the main points. First we are going to start with moisture control. Well no one wants to live in a leaky home and to date I've never met any builder so far who want to go back to the houses that they built to fix damages caused by moisture or water and deal with unhappy clients.

So this section helps builders make sure that they are buildings are protected against water damage and prevent call backs. These homes feature continuous drainage plains, proper flashing and air sealing, dent proof foundation walls, capillary brakes, drain tile and proper grading as added protection for mold and other moisture problems.

Next, radon control. as I mentioned earlier, radon is a big problem and it's responsible for killing 20,000 people a year in the U.S. And how are people exposed to radon? Well they are not exposed to it outdoors, they are exposed to it in the buildings.

Radon leaks in the buildings through the cracks in the building envelope and the foundation and slab. And people who live in high potential risk areas are in higher risk. But the good news is there is a solution for that, and that is building radon-resistant new construction features.

Next is pest management. We all want to live in houses that are free of pests, bugs and other unwanted visitors. And we also want to prevent the use of pesticides because some of these pesticides are carcinogens and they are very harmful to human health. So this section helps you provide a first line defense against pest problems by fully sealing, caulking or screening likely pest entry points.

Next, heating, ventilating and air-conditioning. Well the importance of the quality of air inside homes has increased lately as builders out there started building more energy efficient homes and tighter envelopes.

So, the houses do not breathe anymore. And I'm sure many of you are familiar with this phrase already, "Build tight. Ventilate right." So this section helps improve Indoor Air Quality with best practice design and installation of ducts and equipment to minimize condensation problems, whole house and spot ventilation to help dilute and exhaust indoor pollutants, and air filtration to remove air particulates.

Next, combustion venting. This goes back to the safety of a home. So we'd like to help protect residents from potential exposure to combustion gases. We do that by installing direct vented or power vented, gas and oil fired equipment, properly vented fireplaces, garages that are fully sealed from living spaces and equipped with an exhaust vent and carbon monoxide alarms in each sleeping area.

Next section is building materials. Well consumers out there are already familiar with phrases like "low VOC." Well, this section requires the use of materials with reduced chemical content and low VOC emissions.

And finally, we would like to help ensure that homes operate as designed by inspecting air handling equipment and ductwork to be sure that they are clean and free of debris and provide adequate airflow, verifying that all necessary testing has been performed and providing information to educate owners about their new home's Indoor Air Quality features.

And all of these requirements are steps that a builder takes to help provide a healthier indoor environment. So these are direct benefits to homeowners, therefore they shouldn't be seen as requirements that builders have to implement.

In fact, as many of our current partners do, I suggest that partners out there who sign up for this program, use these features to actually talk about the benefits to homeowners and use these features during their sales meeting with potential clients.

And I'd like to note that these measures alone cannot prevent all Indoor Air Quality problems. Occupant behavior is also important. For example, smoking indoors would negatively impact a home's Indoor Air Quality and the performance of the specified Indoor airPLUS measures. To learn more about the construction specification, you can download the construction specifications document from the Indoor or airPLUS website.

So next you see the actual verification checklist on your screen. I want to share this with you (for people who haven't seen this before and who are not familiar with it) because this is one single page that includes all the checklist items.

That is important because you don't have to go through pages and pages of requirements to qualify a home as Indoor airPLUS. And the process is also very similar to ENERGY STAR's. You can use the same ENERGY STAR rater to do your inspections, and no additional site visits are required. That means that you will be saving time and money.

And towards the right side, you see a larger copy of the moisture control section. And as you can see there are three columns to pick from, every single verification checklist item has to be verified.

Some of those items can be verified by a builder, or all of them can be verified by a rater. And there is also a box for "N/A" and that's because this is a program for the whole nation, and some of the buildings may be in different climate zones where some of those verification requirements may not apply. So in those situations, the "N/A" box is checked.

So there are some items, as I mentioned, on the checklist that can only be verified by the rater. And this will provide the added credibility because of the third-party verification, and serves as an assurance to homeowners as well as builders.

So what do consumers think about this? Why do consumers buy Indoor airPLUS? Well, because they care about their families' health, and they want to provide a healthy environment that is free of pollutants, allergy and asthma triggers, pests and other harmful chemicals. They also want to live comfortably in their homes.

As an example, through the recirculation and filtering of the air, Indoor airPLUS qualified homes manage the relative humidity level in the home, which has a direct impact on comfort level.

Well as you know Thanksgiving is approaching, and one of the current Indoor airPLUS partners often reminds their customers about the discomfort that they feel every year when

family gets together at Thanksgiving and the house gets hot and humid because... well one, there are more people in the home radiating energy and two these people are perspiring moisture into the air.

So the temperature might only rise from 70 degrees to 73 degrees, however, it feels like 80 degrees in the house, and that's because of the relative humidity inside their home. So this partner points out that the HRE system really focuses on managing the indoor air. It is also managing the humidity and improving the comfort level.

Homeowners also buy Indoor airPLUS because it makes financial sense. Every year, Americans spend millions and millions of dollars on products and services that improve Indoor Air Quality. So they see value in good Indoor Air Quality and they spend money.

And they—Also, building materials, free of moisture damage, provide an extended lifetime of those building materials and the home itself, and healthier indoor environments will also help keep their healthcare costs low.

And the last item there is “green,” and this is a word that I'm sure many of you are tired of hearing. However, that is the reality and some of the consumers out there make purchasing decisions just because it's the green thing to do.

And Indoor Air Quality is a part of all green home labeling, rating systems. So one of the reasons they buy Indoor airPLUS homes is just because it's green.

And this next slide, I would like to share this quote with you. This is a quote from one of our Indoor airPLUS homeowners in Oklahoma City. I would like to read this out loud.

“We decided to build a new house after restoring and residing in two 100-year-old homes in a row. We didn't even know the health problems attributed to those old drafty houses until we had our son. After running some low-level allergy symptoms for about a year, we moved into our new home which is Indoor airPLUS certified. The health issues cleared up immediately for all of us. It's amazing what a little clean air can do.”

I think, this is a very strong statement and it really speaks for itself and it really summarizes the benefit of this program.

So, what's the value of being a partner? Well the market has changed and like I mentioned before, I personally know that these are very challenging times for professionals like you outside.

There have been 2 million new homes constructed in the U.S in 2005. Now that number is down to about 500,000s and builders still trying to sell their houses but they're having a hard time doing that, and the reason is not because their houses and their offerings are not good anymore, it's just simply because there are not enough buyers out there.

So what do they need to do? Well they need to take a step further and really understand consumer needs. Well, we all know that consumers care about saving energy and saving costs, but guess what. Consumers know that and the builder next door also knows that, and so he already implemented energy efficiency features just like you did.

So energy efficiency is old news. You cared about the wallet of your consumers. What about their health? What designing construction features do you utilized to help improve the air that homeowners and their kids breathe every day?

Well, as the builders who care about your clients, now there's a label that you can showcase as part of your standard building techniques. So take that step further and really show your consumers that you understand their needs, and differentiate yourself from competition.

This program will also help you gain public recognition because once you become a partner, your name will be listed on EPA's Indoor airPLUS website and the consumers in your region will be able to search for professionals in their region and see your name.

Indoor airPLUS also will help you take a step towards green certification such as LEED and ENERGY STAR Version 3. Well, LEED for Homes' rating system has an indoor environmental quality section, and they offer Indoor airPLUS as an alternative pathway to qualify their requirements.

So, if you're already doing Indoor airPLUS you don't have to worry about the requirements of LEED for Homes' rating systems Indoor Environmental Quality section. This helps with ENERGY STAR Version 3 as well. That new version is coming up in 2012, and is coming with a new section called Moisture Control.

The Moisture Control section of ENERGY STAR Version 3 is almost identical to that of Indoor airPLUS. So if you are doing Indoor airPLUS homes, you don't have to worry about the Moisture Control section of ENERGY STAR Version 3. So it'll help you qualify for ENERGY STAR.

This program will also help you reduce call backs and potential liability, and if you're on this call today, it already shows that you're following the latest technology and trying to bring the

latest to your clients. So you're leaders, and it's time for you to take action and become partners.

And here is another quote from one of our current partners, George Ruzzier, Vice President of Foxwood Builders, Inc. And he said "We build Indoor airPLUS homes because it is the right thing to do." And this is something that we keep hearing over and over again.

Our partners tell us that they care about their products, they care about their homes, and they care about their consumers and this is the right thing to do, and that's why they do it. I think that's a very strong statement.

So how do you build one of these homes? There are three steps. It's very simple. Step one, review tools and materials. Step two, sign the partnership agreement. And step three, build, verify and label homes.

So there is no training required for raters and builders beyond the RESNET approved rater certification for raters. This is very important because that simply means that you can become a partner right now. All you have to do is follow these steps and then sign the partnership agreement.

EPA encourages partners to seek additional training in Indoor Air Quality to strengthen and maintain competency.

So this is our movement. So join the movement! There are Indoor airPLUS partners already in 46 states. And there is least one Indoor airPLUS home in over 30 states. And to-date, over 700 Indoor airPLUS homes have been built. So it is a new movement, and it is the next thing for builders. So get on board.

Some of those states are very active. If you're in one of those states, well the competition is ahead of you so you need to catch up. And if you're one of the states that are not very active, here is an opportunity for you to step up and be the leaders.

As we're getting very close to the 1,000th home, we have partners with varying sizes... Here are some examples on the right side of your screen. We have builders -- top-tier builders to mid-sized builders, Habitat for Humanity partners, as well as small custom home builders.

So what you're listening to here today shouldn't be seen as building codes or mandatory. This is an opportunity for you to differentiate yourself and step up.

And here is the available support. The good news is EPA is here to help and support the growth of this program. And we have many resources available like the ones that you see on your screen.

On the left side, you are seeing an example of a brochure for our professional partners. It's called "Step up to Indoor airPLUS." And on the right side you see an example of a consumer brochure, "Indoor airPLUS: Better Environments Inside and Out." We have more of these brochures and marketing materials on the Indoor airPLUS website, and more resources are continuously added to the website.

In addition to these, there is a Frequently Asked Questions [guide], where professionals and consumers can find answers to their questions and ask more questions. We also have a newsletter for professionals. And with this newsletter, we help our partners stay engaged with the program and get updates about Indoor Air Quality and the program itself.

So we encourage our partners to use these resources to find answers to technical questions and leverage them in their marketing efforts to help them grow their businesses.

And here are some cool tools.

Indoor airPLUS utilizes social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter. So you can join our Facebook page and hear about the program and the latest technologies about Indoor Air Quality and share your ideas with your fellow professional builders or raters.

You can also follow us on Twitter. We continuously update that, and we post important messages about, again, program and Indoor Air Quality technologies. There are also YouTube videos and podcasts available, and these can be used to learn more about the program or also, you can share them with your consumers to educate them about Indoor airPLUS.

We also have an app now. It's called "Indoor airPLUS." So right now you can actually download this app on your iPhone or on your Android phone and use it to verify homes today. You can see the verification checklist on your app, and go through all the checklist items, then send yourself a PDF of the actual checklist and print it out and use that as your actual checklist item for that project. And you can save more than one project on that app. So it's a very cool tool.

So all these tools will help you easily access information and stay engaged with Indoor airPLUS community where ever you are and whenever you want.

So, next step? You need to join. It only takes five minutes to join. All you have to do is go to www.epa.gov/indoorairplus and you can become a partner today.

So thank you for participating in today's webinar. Again as a reminder, we will be keeping these lines open. You can use the webinar technology to submit more questions and we'd like to give you chance to submit any questions that you have. We'll try to answer them as much as we can today. We will be answering all those questions and we'll be posting them online when we post this webinar on EPA's Indoor airPLUS website.

If you have more questions and feedback in the future, you can also contact us at indoor_airplus@epa.gov.

So we are going to wait couple more minutes to for people to ask their questions and then we'll be back online. So the questions are coming in and I'm going to try to answer a couple of them but please keep on sending your questions using the webinar technology and also our e-mail address that we provided earlier.

So a question about the app: "Does the app work on iPad or only iPhone?" Currently, our app only works on iPhone and Android phones. It's not available for iPad yet.

"You mentioned LEED but nothing about and NAHB Green certification program is EPA integrating this program at NAHB?"

Currently, EPA's Indoor airPLUS program is talking to NAHB as they're getting ready to develop and launch their new standards. So that is in progress.

"Is the checklist form available online at ENERGY STAR's website?"

There are links to the Indoor airPLUS website through ENERGY STAR's website. So you can access them that way.

So I think those are all the questions that we will take today, and then we'll be answering all of the questions, as I mentioned earlier, at a later time. And when we post the webinar online all of your questions and the answers will be posted on there as well.

So thank you again for participating in today's webinar, and have a good day.

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