

"Fire Equipment Serves Double Duty in Green Brook"

Green Brook Township's Green Design Group (GDG) and the Fire Department are collaborating to help homeowners save energy and prevent fires. They are offering a combination thermal/fire assessment of residents' homes using a special heat sensitive camera and the trained eye of a firefighter.

Thermal imaging technology helps firefighters find missing people and identify hot spots. But it can also be used to see where heat is escaping in a building, so homeowners can see where they should seal up cracks and openings in order to reduce energy consumption. (A New Jersey Division of Fire Safety grant program made thermal imaging cameras available to all the State's fire departments in 2000.)

We want to educate our residents about energy efficiency," said GDG Chair Dini Checko in an interview with MyCentralJersey.com . "Through talks with our fire department we realized their heat-sensitive camera and trained eyes could locate where heat is escaping from a home."

As part of the assessment, the Fire Department also offers suggestions to help eliminate fire hazards. This service is being offered in the winter months since the thermal camera works best when it's cold outside. The assessment is for informational purposes only, and homeowners receive information about helpful websites, current rebates and suggestions to fix energy inefficiencies. The Green Brook Fire Department requests a tax-deductible \$25 donation for the service.

The first thermal/fire assessment took place in December 2009 and about 18 assessments had taken place by March 1, earning the fire department about \$300 in donations. One of the homeowners had originally thought that all their windows needed to be replaced, but the camera showed the windows were actually in good condition and heat was escaping from two main areas, the garage and basement slab. With this information, they had a much better idea of where to focus their attention. They also learned that specific recess lights in their kitchen were not properly insulated, allowing heat to escape through the ceiling.

According to Checko, this program is truly a win-win for all parties. The firefighters benefit from the opportunity to provide safety inspections, meet residents and collect donations. The homeowners learn how to make their homes safer, and enjoy lower heating bills and greater comfort if they implement the suggestions.

Article by Julie Lange Groth, from Spring 2010 Association of NJ Environmental Commissions ANJEC Report