



## Free Energy Test for New Houses

By Kelsey Crane and Tim Stevens

Do you live in a recently constructed house? You may be eligible to get several tests that measure the energy efficiency of your house – at no charge! This offer is made via the Sierra Club's Virginia Chapter and is available to members of Sierra Club who live in Virginia.

The offer applies to houses in Virginia less than one year old, and not certified under an energy efficiency brand such as Energy Star.

Virginia's residential building code now requires that new homes be sufficiently sealed such that there are no more than 5 air changes per hour. Also, the code limits leakage from the heating/cooling ductwork to no more than 6%. These standards are intended to help consumers by reducing their energy costs and improving indoor air quality.



However, Virginia (unlike nearly every other state) only requires a *visual* inspection of the HVAC systems installed by the builder to ensure that these standards are met. Obviously there should be a mechanical test to determine if the house actually meets the state's requirements. Because these tests are not required, builders in Virginia rarely perform the mechanical tests known as "blower door" (to test the building envelope) and "duct blaster" (to test the tightness of ducts).

The Sierra Club's offer of a free blower door and duct blaster test will help the Club gather data to determine whether new homes built under the state's residential building code are actually meeting the standard. The offer is worth \$250 for a small house and more for a larger one. The owner will be provided with a written report of the results, including recommendations for correcting any defects found.

If the new house was built under one of the third party energy efficiency brands (such as Energy Star, LEED, PassiveHouse or EarthCraft House), it was already tested mechanically, and meets that brand's better-than-code requirements for energy efficiency.

For more information about this offer and to sign up for the free tests, send Kelsey Crane an email with "Energy Test" in the subject line, at [kelsey.crane@sierraclub.org](mailto:kelsey.crane@sierraclub.org).

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