

# Energy loan plan gaining in popularity

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If a homeowner goes from an out-of-date home-heating system to a new, energy-efficient system the savings can be as high as 30 percent or even 40 percent on monthly heating bills, said Peter Krajsa, president of AFC First Financial Corp., Allentown.

With home fuel prices skyrocketing, that can add up to a large dollar amount — one of the reasons that participation in AFC First's Energy-Loan program is up 41 percent this year over last, Krajsa said.

"It's been pretty consistent growth over the last three to four years," said Krajsa. He said as home fuel costs continue to escalate more people are realizing that taking a loan out to pay for either a more efficient traditional heating system, a geothermal or solar system is worth the investment.

"You're payback on the loan can be pretty quick," he said.

But AFC First isn't the one out there selling the improvements, it's the contractors. He said AFC First has more than a thousand home-heating contractors in

11 states including Pennsylvania that offer the financing to their customers.

"I'd say 90 percent of our business is through contractors," said Krajsa. "If your heat pump blows up, and an approved contractor comes out, they should give you this as a financing option."

Apgar Oil Co. Inc., in Allentown, for example, promotes the AFC program on its telephone on-hold message.

Another such contractor is Moyer Plumbing and Heating of Kutztown. Co-owner Steve Moyer said he often recommends equipment replacement during a renovation if he finds a system that is operating inefficiently. He said a customer might not even know the system is out-of-date.

"It varies not so much on the age, but on the brand and the design," he explained.

Moyer said some older burners were designed in a very forward-thinking and energy-efficient manner, whereas some models that are less than 10 years old could already be outdated.

Moyer noted that most residential heating units are now EnergyStar rated, so it's

easier to choose an appropriate replacement.

The City of Allentown is also getting involved in making loans to help homeowners get more efficient heating systems. The city is partnering with the Bethlehem-based KNBT and the Pennsylvania Housing Financing Authority to provide loans of up to \$38,000 to make home repairs, including those to increase heating efficiency.

David Paulus, acting director of building standards for the city, said renovations can include anything from installing a new heating system, to adding insulation.

It's not just updated HVAC systems that are saving consumers money, homeowners are also investing in more efficient windows and doors to cut down on energy costs, said Paulus.

"Most of the people who call for help ask about windows as well," he said.

Marc Rapchak, general manager of A.B.E. Doors and Windows in Allentown, said the number of people coming in looking for more heat efficient doors and windows has gone up drastically in the past few years, as home-heating fuel costs have risen.