



Dissecting Star Programs: Energy, Home and Building

BY KEN BRENDEN

New energy performance rating and incentive programs, the Home Star residential retrofit program, and a complimentary program for commercial buildings, Building Star, currently are traversing through Congress. Meanwhile, the ENERGY STAR® program is receiving a major makeover.

Home Star

Home Star, officially introduced in the House of Representatives as The Home Star Energy Retrofit Act of 2010 (HR 5019) and unofficially dubbed “Cash for Caulkers,” calls for rebates direct to homeowners who invest in qualifying home energy efficiency improvements, including replacement doors and windows. As of this writing, the bill had passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee and was slated to move to a vote by the full chamber, followed by a Senate vote.

The program proposes two levels of participation. The Silver Star incentive level focuses on specific energy-saving measures such as window replacement and provides cash rebates for 50 percent of project costs up to a \$1,500 maximum. The program as proposed would cover a project “that replaces at least eight exterior windows or skylights or 75 percent of the exterior windows and skylights in a home, whichever is less, with windows or skylights that are certified by NFRC.”

The performance-based Gold Star incentive offers higher rebate amounts for consumers who develop a customized retrofit plan based on a thorough energy audit. Homeowners can receive \$3,000 for modeled savings of 20 percent, plus

\$1,500 for each additional five percent of modeled energy savings, with incentives not to exceed 50 percent of total project costs. Recommended measures can include replacement doors and windows.

The Home Star proposal also attempts to impose new quality assurance standards covering contractor accreditation and workforce

“Homeowners can receive \$3,000 for modeled savings of 20 percent, plus \$1,500 for each additional five percent of modeled energy savings.”

training and certification. While the measures do not mention anything related specifically to door and window installation, they give latitude for the Department of Energy (DOE) to recognize various existing programs. Accordingly, AAMA is working to gain recognition of the InstallationMasters™ program, now with 10,000 program participants under its belt, as the preferred option for qualifying window installers.

Building Star

As Home Star is to residential, Building Star is to commercial. Introduced in the Senate as S 3079 on March 26 and referred to the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, it would provide rebates and tax incentives to building owners for energy retrofits in commercial and multi-family residential buildings.

Building Star’s proposed rebates

would cover approximately 30 percent of the cost of installing energy-efficient products and/or providing related services. Qualifying windows would be eligible for \$150 or \$300 per unit.

ENERGY STAR

As this legislation unfolds, the ENERGY STAR program for doors, windows and skylights is facing a comprehensive and aggressive revamp. Under the new regime, EPA becomes the lead agency on the ENERGY STAR program while DOE offers technical support.

ENERGY STAR will also become a two-tiered program encompassing both its existing scope aimed at a 25 percent or less market share, plus a new top-tier—to be known as “Super Star”—for the approximately five percent of top-performing products.

AAMA supports both Home Star and Building Star as means to get more contractors back to work and spur production of qualified products designed to reduce energy use and associated costs for homeowners and building owners. We will, however, remain watchful that their performance criteria, compliance timelines, standards and testing and certification protocols reflect real-world capability at a cost-benefit balance that will enable them to reach their admirable goals. ■

Ken Brenden serves as technical services manager for the American Architectural Manufacturers Association in Schaumburg, Ill. He may be reached at kbrenden@aamanet.org. His opinions are solely his own and do not necessarily reflect those of this magazine.