

Green Communities Policy and Program Material Questions

Is the presentation posted online?

Yes, you can access the presentation here:

http://www.mnhousing.gov/idc/groups/homes/documents/webcontent/mhfa_008990.pdf

Can you make available a copy of a sample Intended Methods form that has already been completed?

Yes. We will post a sample by the end of January, 2010. Please check the RLP and CRV program pages in the "Additional Resources" section.

Where are forms 9 and 11, indicating the intent to comply with Green Communities and compliance with Green Communities located?

These are not actually separate forms. Section 9 of the Intended Methods of Satisfying Green Communities Criteria, Release & Certification form is used to sign and indicate your intent to comply and Section 11 of that same form to indicate compliance once the project is completed.

If criterion 2.3 is always waived, why is it indicated in "yellow" on the presentation and as mandatory?

Criterion 2.3 is mandatory, not optional, in the national Green Communities criteria, so we have indicated that this is the case. As it applies to Minnesota Housing projects, however, we have waived this requirement via the Minnesota Housing Overlay.

Why would a simple replacement of a well or septic system trigger green requirements?

Single-family green rehabilitation requirements apply to acquisition-rehabilitation-resale proposals under CRV and owner-occupied rehabilitation projects under the Rehabilitation Loan Program. The RLP now uses federal HOME funds, which dictate that all property deficiencies must be cured. Therefore, only replacing a well or septic system is not an eligible program activity. If the failure of a well or septic system is a verified emergency, a RLP lender can offer a replacement through the Emergency and Accessibility Loan Program, which isn't subject to the Green Communities criteria.

Single-Family Program Specific Questions – CRV and RLP

Do all RLP units require a blower door test?

Yes, with the following exceptions: If the home has been weatherized in the past 5 years you should document that in the file but a new test is not required. You should still identify and consider any additional energy conservation options when developing the Scope of Work. If the home is deemed to already be adequately energy efficient, you can submit a waiver request demonstrating energy efficiency adequacy.

For RLP providers, if we cannot use our Weatherization auditors and have to pay a utility company or somebody from the Dunwoody list, can we modify our administration fee amount with Minnesota Housing to cover this additional cost?

At this time, this fee is not an eligible soft cost. Minnesota Housing has, however, asked its Rehabilitation Loan Program lenders to document any costs not currently covered in their soft cost fees and submit demonstration of those costs in writing. Please note that the cost of energy testing can be built into the borrower's loan.

For RLP providers, if a home was weatherized less than 15 years ago the Weatherization program won't go back unless there are very high consumption records. What do we do in this case for the energy efficiency requirement?

If the home is ineligible for Weatherization because it has been weatherized in the past five years, you do not need to follow the Weatherization field guide or test the home. Additional opportunities for improving energy efficiency, particularly beyond the services Weatherization provides, should still be considered in the Scope of Work. If the home is ineligible for reasons other than previous weatherization within the last five years, a pre- and post-rehab blower door test and the identification additional energy saving opportunities must be conducted.

As a CRV administrator, we are going out to bid on two whole house rehabilitations using prior period RFP CRV funds. Will we need to modify our scopes of work on those to comply with the new CRV Green components?

Green Communities criteria apply only to rehabilitation activities awarded and funded under CRV awarded with the spring 2010 round. To the degree compliance is possible with previous awards, adopting some or all of the standards is highly encouraged.

Once a CRV app is awarded, is there going to be a manual detailing step-by-step the process for implementing a project, from start to finish and the necessary documents required?

See the process section of the PowerPoint presentation from the training, as well as other reference materials on the CRV program page on the website. For additional assistance, please contact program staff.

Green Communities Implementation Questions

Do we have to use contractors who have done any training in the green methods and if so, what do we need from them to show they have done the training?

No, the individual contractors do not have to participate in green specific training sessions. Very few, if any, of the requirements would necessitate any unusual installation methods or practices, so the greatest difficulty may come from the finding of compliant products and materials. However, when you sign the Intended Methods Form you are verifying that you will ensure the contractor meets the intent of the Green Communities criteria, so it may be a good idea to not only include detail on product requirements in your specs, but to discuss the requirements with selected contractors and follow up by reviewing invoices or visiting the site.

If we have separate Plumbing and Electrical Contractors vs. a General Contractor, do both need to sign off on Green Form since we are dealing with them separately? Does the Carpenter also then need to sign off re: paint, etc.? So all three may have to sign off?

No. In the case where there is no General Contractor, the administrator may be the only signor. Bear in mind, however, that by signing you are warranting that all requirements have been met.

Can the owner still perform final painting of repaired and primed or new surfaces as before?

It would be acceptable for the owner to paint/primer new surfaces or surfaces that do not contain lead paint. The low VOC criteria for paints and primers still apply, however, so materials would have to be purchased with loan funds and provided to the owner. No other form of homeowner labor is allowed without written approval of Minnesota Housing.

Green Communities Criteria Specific Questions

3.3 Landscaping

Would any landscaping activities associated with remediation of lead-based paint contaminated soil would be exempt from Section 3.3?

No, you'd still need to ensure that plants selected for the landscaping are non-invasive species native to Minnesota and appropriate for the soil type. Per HUD lead rules, you might also consider alternative landscaping techniques such as the use of a minimum of 6 inches of gravel or bark.

4.1 b Water Conserving Appliances and Fixtures

Most toilets I see are 1.6gpf not 1.3-please explain?

Toilets that flush at a rate 1.6 gallons per flush (gpm) are indeed commonplace. The Green Communities criteria aims to reduce water consumption and thereby specifies toilets at 1.3 gpf or better. The EPA's WaterSense program certifies toilets that achieve water efficiency and operational effectiveness, and may be a good place to start in locating compliant toilets. Manufacturers offering WaterSense compliant toilets include American Standard, Eljer, Kohler, Price Pfister, Zurn, and many other major brands. Use the following link to use the WaterSense product locator: http://www.epa.gov/watersense/product_search.html

5.1b Efficient Energy Use: Rehab

If we are going to completely gut a house and replace all windows, can we skip the initial blower door test since it will be fairly meaningless given the extent of the rehab? What about a pre-drywall blower door test so that we have a reasonable idea of what the house is going to perform like and still have the opportunity to address any remaining leaks before finishing the house?

In all cases the home should be tested to identify opportunities for energy conservation. It would be acceptable to do the pre-test either to perform the test pre-drywall or after drywall.

If a home was weatherized less than 15 years ago the Weatherization program won't go back unless there are very high consumption records. What do we do in this case for this requirement?

If the home is ineligible for Weatherization because it has been weatherized in the past five years, you do not need to follow the Weatherization field guide or test the home. Additional opportunities for improving energy efficiency, particularly beyond the services Weatherization provides, should still be considered in the Scope of Work. If the home is ineligible for reasons other than previous weatherization within the last five years, a pre- and post-rehab blower door test and the identification additional energy saving opportunities must be conducted.

Can we still install a standard tank type water heater with a minimum .90 EF rating?

Yes. The Green Communities criteria do not specify a minimum efficiency rating. Tank-type water heaters are allowed so long as it is located in a room with non-water sensitive flooring, a drain piped to the exterior of dwelling, and sloped, corrosion resistant drain pan.

5.3a Efficient Lighting Interior

So, when replacing light fixtures, at least 50% need to be Energy Star rated? Are there specific locations we should concentrate on?

In the case of gut rehab where lighting fixtures have to be replaced throughout the unit, install the Energy Star Advanced Lighting Package (which consists of a minimum of 60% Energy Star qualified hard-wired fixtures and 100% Energy Star qualified ceiling fans where installed). As for specific locations, look for opportunities where lights are most commonly used (e.g. living room, kitchen, bedrooms). A best practice recommendation when reusing existing fixtures is to install or recommend the installation of CFLs.

7.1 Low/No Volatile Organic Compounds

Does anyone know where the low/no VOC label is on the paint cans? We want to be able to tell our contractors bidding on the projects.

While the designation on the can for a low- or no-VOC paint might vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, contractors can ask their suppliers who should be knowledgeable concerning options. Major manufacturers such as Benjamin Moore, Dutch Boy, and Olympic all have low/no VOC products, as do many lesser known brands.

7.6 Ventilation/Other

Can we rely solely on the Weatherization Program to address additional combustion air and supplemental air requirements? That has been the case for our in-house Weatherization Program.

Comply with Weatherization Program whenever it is more restrictive than Minnesota Administrative Rules, chapter 1322. According to Minnesota Administrative Rules, chapter 1322, a combustion air supply must be provided in accordance with Minnesota Rules, chapter 1346, when an alteration includes installation of attic insulation, wall insulation in more than 50 percent of the area of exterior above grade walls, insulation in at least 50 percent of rim joist spaces, cladding replacement covering more than 50 percent of the total area of exterior walls, or replacement of more than 50 percent of the total number of exterior windows and doors combined. Some exceptions apply. Regarding supplemental air requirements, according to Minnesota Administrative Rules, chapter 1322, a dwelling unit mechanical ventilation system is required for buildings whose permit of initial construction was applied on or after April 15, 2000.

7.10b Basements and Concrete Slabs: Radon

Minnesota State Code requires radon mitigation only for new construction and was not intended for rehab per Inquiry #2009-03 MN DOLI. Are you aware of that intent?

Yes, we are aware that radon mitigation is not required per state code for rehab. The Green Communities criteria at times exceed Minnesota State Code and at times the Minnesota State Code exceeds the requirements of Green Communities.

Since radon is a heavy gas, why are vents for the mitigation system being installed close to the ceiling on the upper floors instead of focusing in the basement or near attached garages? Can we simply vent a radon mitigation pipe through the rimboard, as in a dryer vent, to avoid excessive costs with construction of chaseways, etc.?

Radon infiltrates homes through cracks and openings in the foundation of a home. The gas then tends to accumulate in the lower levels. Suction points for the mitigation system are placed in high concentration areas such as basements and near attached garages. Pipes are then routed from the suction point to the discharge point, which should be above the roofline. When radon is not vented above the roofline there is a chance that the gas could be reintroduced to the home through windows or fresh-air intakes. Also, venting out the side of the home could create high levels in the immediate breathing space. Venting above the roofline insures that the gas will disperse in the atmosphere.

State Code requires that CO detectors are installed in existing dwellings within 10 feet of all rooms used for sleeping, though no distinction is made regarding how high or low it is placed on the wall. Placing them near bedrooms alerts residents more quickly should there be a dangerous level of CO, and the detectors are also more easily accessible to track exposure over time. Detectors with digital readouts are recommended though not required. Placing a detector near an attached garage is an eligible expense in the RLP program and a best practice under Green Communities and the Minnesota Overlay.

What is an example of radon mitigation in a home on a crawlspace? Installation of an impermeable membrane?

This would involve the covering of the crawlspace by a minimum 6 mil poly sheeting and depressurizing the space under the sheeting using PVC piping and an inline fan.

Do we need to do a radon test on mobile homes? If so, why, they are above ground?

It is good practice to still test mobile homes, particularly when there is skirting around the base. The skirting can act similarly to a crawl space in a traditional home. Radon can accumulate in this space and enter the home through plumbing penetrations. If the installation of the mobile home is such that there is no chance of radon gas accumulation, request a waiver when you submit your "Intended Methods" form.

7.13 Clothes Dryer Exhaust

In a laundry room that does not have an openable window nor does it have an exhaust fan, can an exhaust fan be installed? I have seen many situations where the walls are moldy due to inadequate ventilation.

Dryer venting to the exterior is required per Green Communities, so installing an exhaust fan alone would not be an acceptable method as an alternative. If the exhaust fan would help address the mold issue, it would be an eligible use of funds to both install a dryer vent and an exhaust fan system under the Rehab Loan Program.

In new construction, code stipulates the installation of either an openable window or an exhaust fan vented directly to the outdoors. Laundry rooms are treated similarly to a bathroom due to the nature of the humidity generated in that area. But, with Rehab loan funds it seems they cannot be used to install such an item unless it is an existing feature. It seems if we are removing moldy sheetrock, it would be ideal to replace it with greenboard and put in a form of ventilation to prevent it from recurring. Is this allowable?

Possibly. While generally the Rehabilitation Loan Program is intended for repair and replacement of existing systems and features, this is primarily to prevent it from being a program to "finish" incomplete houses (for example, installing an original plumbing system, central air, electrical, etc.). Mold, being a health threat, might be treated differently depending on the conditions and equipment needed to address it. Contact program staff to discuss specific situations where mold mitigation is needed. If greenboard is installed anywhere, do not install it over a vapor barrier.

The WX Program currently installs insulated flex-duct at the last 4-feet of dryer vent as it exits the home. Should we specify this as well? Our code currently requires a 4" smooth aluminum or galvanized-steel air duct with an exception that the 1st 8-feet from appliance may be flexible air duct. Is this still Ok?

Green Communities requires that the clothes dryer vent to the exterior of the home. If flex-duct is compliant with Weatherization and local code this is acceptable.

7.15 Lead Safe Work Practices

If the lead risk assessment comes up no lead do you still have to have a clearance done at the end of the job?

No. You'll need to have a clearance done only if lead was identified and addressed using lead-safe work practices.