

Just Change organises free environmental upgrades

Just Change aims to help landlords benefit from environmentally sustainable improvements to rental properties.

Governments have been offering a range of incentives for home owners to improve the sustainability of their homes but these measures have not been successful in rental homes, as there is less incentive for owners to undertake the upgrades – after all, they themselves do not reap the benefits of lower utilities bills.

It is for this reason that the REIV supports the Just Change group. A group of volunteers, Just Change has trialled a program to upgrade rental homes with simple changes to reduce water- and energy-use.

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Just Change offered free assessments, then, for around \$1200 per house, the installation of ceiling insulation, water-saving showerheads, energy-saving light bulbs, draught proofing on windows and doors, exhaust fan covers and 'Clear Comfort' window treatments. The good

news is that most of these costs were covered by a number of rebate programs.

Just Change has released its final report and the findings make for interesting reading. It found that:

- *There is a large pool of funding available to support household energy efficiency activities. However the schemes and rebates are complicated, difficult to access and change frequently.*
- *There is a lack of knowledge about existing insulation levels. In many cases no one knows whether their property has insulation.*
- *Many Victorian dwellings have partial but not complete insulation, which meant they were not eligible for federal rebates.*
- *Low-income renters face the additional barrier of trying to get consent from the landlord before their homes can be improved.*



So, despite the improvements' being free, gaining their landlords' consent was difficult and tenants were often unwilling to ask for the changes out of concern that their rent may increase.

The report simply highlights a better way is needed if renters are to benefit from the environmental features that owner-occupiers do.

The State Government is now looking at this issue and in May 2011 all homes will require disclosure of a property's energy efficiency to potential renters and purchasers. Landlords and property managers should expect more news and changes in the future.

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