

Boerne builder electrified by new insulation

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BOERNE — Homebuilder Terry Posey doesn't have anything against pink, but you won't see any during the construction of his new home in this quaint Hill Country community.

None of the big, pink, puffy rolls or blown pink tufts of fiberglass insulation. Instead, Posey is building his home as the first in Texas to rely solely on a ceramic paintlike coating for insulation.

The test case has local power companies paying attention.

The Pedernales Electric Cooperative is keeping tabs on the project, as is City Public Service. It's the type of product that CPS is considering offering rebates for in an effort to save energy and fight air pollution, said Laura Compton, City Public Service supervisor of forecasting and pricing.

"We are definitely looking at them and have been talking to them," she said.

Only one stipulation: It has to work.

Guy Harrell, managing partner of Western Ceramic & Coatings, isn't worried about his ceramic coating fizzling under the scrutiny. He is quick to point to studies by numerous agencies that tout the benefits of the paint for its insulation and fire-retardant abilities. These include a Florida Energy Office report that showed energy savings of 26 percent to 30 percent.

The coating is applied with a spray gun and looks similar to primer. Harrell said the ceramic paint acts as a thermal barrier, blocking the sun's heat and keeping a house from loading heat — which makes its air-conditioning system work harder.

It sounds interesting to Joe Paramo, Pedernales Electric Cooperative conservation supervisor. But he has questions beyond the potential energy savings before his utility will endorse the ceramic coating as a conservation measure: "It all depends on cost."

Posey has similar questions. He is building the 8,800-square-foot home for himself, but said he'd consider using the coating on homes he puts on the market if he can justify the added cost.

He estimates the ceramic paint is 12 cents to 15 cents more a square foot to install than standard fiberglass insulation. He's counting on recouping the cost in his power bills.

"If it turns out like he (Harrell) says it does, and like I've seen from my research on the Internet, then definitely," Posey said. "It might be a little more expensive, but everyone is looking to lower their utility bills."

Linda Stone, executive director of the Metropolitan Partnership for Energy, has a similar take. Her efforts to find energy-saving building methods for San Antonio tempted her to try the ceramic coating on the roof of a home she is renovating.

Once the house is occupied, she wants CPS to track the power usage and compare it with similar homes.

"We just put it on the roof; but that's where most of the heating and cooling goes out," she said.