

# THE ASPEN TIMES

## Aspen's 'green' way

An Aspen Times Editorial

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Aspen continues to be a leader in the fight to slow the process of global warming, and it's something in which most Aspenites seem to take pride. The city of Aspen and the Aspen Skiing Co., though they certainly aren't perfect, continue to show other municipal governments and private companies new ways to reduce their impact on the environment.

As we've seen recently, however, all these effort can be overshadowed by the huge, resource-consuming homes that have made our town an international symbol of wealth and excess. As one representative of the oil and gas industry noted recently, Aspen's "mountain-top mansions burn more natural gas in a day than most Coloradoans use in a week."

When it comes to the environment, Aspen has an image problem. All the cutting-edge, green-building policies in the world cannot erase the trophy homes, heated driveways and private jets in and around town.

A recent study by the Sopris Foundation found that vacation homes account for 61 percent of Aspen's annual carbon footprint, even though they're unoccupied for an average of 277 days per year. The study also found that Aspen has 129 homes of 8,000 square feet or more; that's a whole lot of wasted space.

Ironically, there is an environmental benefit to these homes. Aspen and Pitkin County charge fees when owners build large, energy-consuming homes, and those fees go into a fund that supports a variety of environmental initiatives. The program has raised some \$8 million since its inception in 2000, and that money has supported numerous energy-efficiency projects and greenhouse gas reduction efforts.

As a community, Aspen is doing the right thing; these fees are a strong incentive not to build an "energy hog" of a house, and they actually turn environmental offenses into benefits. But legislative carrots and sticks won't force all residents and second-home owners to give a damn about global warming, or to keep their egos in architectural check.

Down the road, however, even the rich and famous will have to rethink their lifestyles if they value the world as we know it — from the melting polar ice caps to the length and quality of our local ski seasons. That's why we were happy to learn this week that the city of Aspen and Holy Cross Energy might put more bite into their tiered electricity rates, making it more expensive for those who use large amounts of power (see story in News).

Aspen does have an environmental conscience and does believe in greenhouse gas reduction, despite the tastes and habits of some of our extravagant residents and visitors. If you're building a home in Aspen and want to make a positive local impression, then think green instead of big.

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