

Roofing group urges caution on Obama plan

By Miles Moore

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WASHINGTON—President Obama's proposal to give cash rebates to homeowners who install energy-efficient products in their homes is good news for many manufacturers in the rubber and other industries.

However, the EPDM Roofing Association urged caution in that roofing materials designated "energy-efficient" may not work in all climates.

For most of his tenure, Energy Secretary Steven Chu has called for installation of "cool" or white roofs as a method of reducing cooling costs and offsetting carbon emissions.

Lighter-colored roofs or roofs with special coatings reflect more of the sun's heat, Chu said in a July 2010 release issued by the Energy Department's National Nuclear Safety Administration.

But Mike DuCharme, ERA chairman and director of product marketing for Carlisle Construction Materials, said the "One Roof Fits All" theory is contradicted by real-world experience.

"We support the president's initiative," DuCharme said. "These rebates will encourage re-roofing as people upgrade their homes to become more energy-efficient."

But roof color is far from being the most important factor in choosing a roof for energy efficiency, according to DuCharme. "Factors such as the life cycle impact, long-term service life of the roof cover and the ease of recycling are critically important," he said. "Roofs need to be designed as systems, and there are energy-efficient EPDM roof systems for every climate."

"In terms of roofing, there's more to being green than black or white," he said. EPDM roofing manufacturers offer many choices in both black and white roof membranes, he added.

Whereas white roofs can indeed reduce home energy consumption in warm

climates, black or dark roofs that absorb heat often make more sense in cooler climates, according to DuCharme.

A recent article from the ERA website, "EPDM: A Roof System for Every Climate," explains that the choice and even the importance of roof color varies from region to region.

"There's little question that a white roof is the best choice in Florida," the article stated. "But across the geographic middle of North America, there is a neutral or gray area. In these areas, one can make a case that energy efficiency is not impacted by roof membrane color."

DuCharme said you can draw a line across the U.S. from Charlotte, through

Memphis, to just north of Phoenix. Buildings anywhere south of that line would benefit from white roofs, he said, whereas the further north you go from the line, black roofs offer ever greater benefits.

President Obama announced his energy efficiency program in February at Penn State University, elaborating on it in a speech later at Savannah Technical College in Georgia.

Requiring a vote in Congress, the program would give homeowners who buy energy-saving products an on-the-spot rebate of \$1,000 or more. Roofing, insulation, doors, windows, HVAC units and hot-water heaters are among the items that would qualify for rebates under the program.

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