

## **Cape Town aims for 'green' cheap housing**

The possibility of "greening" low-cost housing is being tested by the City of Cape Town.

Head of the New Housing Department, Peter Oscroft, said the city was trying to get an idea of what features could potentially be included into the low-cost housing budgets in order to increase their energy efficiency and reduce operational costs in the long run.

He said there were things that could be done which did not necessarily cost much, such as constructing awnings over north-facing windows or using LED instead of incandescent lighting.

Such features would either be included in the specifications for low cost housing, or exist as an add-on to the standard specifications. Because of the restrictions on size and budgets for new housing developments these changes needed to be researched and priced and a compendium of findings was required to inform whether or not the process was viable.

Oscroft said there was a push in all areas of government to increase energy efficiency. This was evidenced earlier this year when the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) started putting plans in place to increase the energy-efficiency of low-cost housing, although these strategies were problematic as they would increase the costs of low-cost housing provision.

In May this year the DME's Deputy Director for Energy Efficiency Maphuti Legodie said there were "a number of initiatives" that were being proposed in order to reduce the country's high carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions.

Some of the strategies included the use of solar water heating systems, the positioning, colour, and design of the houses, as well as their orientation to the sun.

The use of gas stoves and ovens would also be encouraged.

Phetola Makgathe, chief executive officer at the National Home Builders' Registration Council (NHBRC), said the size of windows in low-cost homes was likely to be reduced slightly to reduce heat loss or gain, and insulation in the ceiling and between the walls and floors to be stipulated.

According to Makgathe the new building plans should ensure a more comfortable temperature for inhabitants, as well as reduce the load on the country's burdened electricity infrastructure.

Unfortunately, however, "there will be additional upfront costs".

The standard subsidy for a 40sqm house is R60k, but Cape Town-based architect David Roberts said: "People are somewhat under the misconception that this type of building (green building) needs to be expensive."

Roberts said aside from building houses designed to be more energy-efficient, the Department of Housing should utilize locally-sourced building materials such as sand or clay.

He said although using these materials was more labour-intensive, on the plus side, more jobs could be created.

Making sand bags and compressed earth bricks, for instance, would not only stimulate micro-enterprises, create opportunities and allow people to learn skills, but were better insulation materials than the standard concrete brick.

He said these were "perfectly good systems, just unconventional".