



## Philadelphia's Coolest Block Contest

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Green energy-saving techniques have never been so black and white in urban Philadelphia, where city row home residents are gearing up for the "[Coolest Block Contest](#)." The contest is part of the city's RetroFIT Philly program, which aims to bring more attention to consumer-friendly energy-saving products. The winners of the contest will receive a white roof makeover, air sealing and insulation upgrades, and a free energy audit.



### The Bang Behind the Buck

The contest is being organized by [The Energy Coordinating Agency \(ECA\) of Philadelphia and the City of Philadelphia](#). It is also co-sponsored by The [Dow Chemical Company](#). All three organizations are working towards increasing the public's energy consciousness, as well as modernizing and upgrading the city's charming but antiquated row homes. "Most were built without the advantage of modern building science or materials," said executive director of Philadelphia's ECA in an interview with ABC7. "The initiative to make them more energy-efficient, and in effect 'greener,' can help to improve the quality of life for the residents while saving them money on heating and cooling bills."

### What's So Cool About White Roofs?

Most row homes were originally built with flat, black asphalt roofs. This kind of roofing soaks up the heat from the sun and causes homes to get very hot very fast in the summertime. A one-time application of a special white acrylic roof coating, however, can reduce the exterior temperature by 50 to 80 degrees. It does so by reflecting the sun's heat instead of absorbing it. This translates into a potential 20 percent reduction in



the need and cost for indoor cooling systems. And if a whole block of row homes does a white roof makeover, the benefits will go further than each individual family's cooler living room. Cool roofs actually help to reduce the temperature outside by combating the "[urban heat island effect](#)." This phenomenon occurs when lots of heat-absorbing surfaces (rooftops, sidewalks, roads, etc.) are built within close confines of one another and continuously trap heat. Cool roofs lead to cooler air circulation and improved air quality. Quite simply put: It's a win-win situation.

## Insulation Can Keep Bills Under Tight Control

The "Coolest Block Contest" is also promoting proper home insulation techniques as a way of reducing energy usage. Air leaks around windows, doors, and other areas in a home can cause up to 40 percent of heat loss in the winter and air conditioning loss in the summer, according to the [U.S. Department of Energy](#). However, a simple coating of insulating foam sealant around problem areas can reduce heating and cooling bills by as much as 30 percent. The foam sealant works to close any air gaps or cracks by expanding on contact and then drying over the problem area. This keeps heated or cooled air from escaping the house and running up energy bills.

## How Does The Contest Work?

The 3 Musketeers summed it up best - "All for one and one for all." The winning block must rally the most residents in favor of energy conservation and then each home will receive one energy-saving white roof. Entrants will also be required to write a profile of their neighborhood and how they hope to see it change for the better in the future. The "Coolest Block Contest" applicant entry deadline is April 5. The applicants will be judged by a panel of local media representatives, environmental organizations, and the building industry. Winners will be announced by May 10 and cool roofs will be provided this summer. The ECA and City of Philadelphia hope that the contest will educate and encourage more Philly residents to take the plunge. "Our Greenworks Philadelphia goal is to retrofit 15 percent of the city's row home roofs, and the 'Coolest Block Contest' is jumpstarting this effort," said Mayor Michael A. Nutter.