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Straw bale housing proves efficient

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CHBA REPORT



Jerry Roehr
President, CHBA

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the most tangible expression
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people are with the current
public policy environment."
■

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Underground Economy Holds a Lesson for Us All

During the past year as president of the Canadian Home Builders' Association, I have shared in the enormous effort to convince all levels of government of the need to reform tax, regulatory policies and laws which continue to hamstring the home building and renovation industry.

What is strange is that practically every government advocates reform to support a stronger private sector, yet they want to do this without taking action.

Where could we look for a perfect example of what is required to release entrepreneurial initiative, stimulate economic activity, create employment, put money into people's pockets and reduce the costs and rigidities of our tax and regulatory environments?

The example is the underground economy.

I am not being cynical, nor am I advocating tax evasion. Yet it is clear that the active underground is the most tangible expression we have of how fed up people are with the current public policy environment. The underground economy has been created and is nourished by government in action. And, rather than taking measures to reduce the burden on legitimate home builders and renovators, governments, particularly the Federal government, are actually adding costs and regulations.

Little wonder that the tax-free, regulation-free underground economy has little problems finding new recruits. The growth of the underground is a stark lesson to governments on what must be done. And quickly.

- Reform the tax system, and make it fairer and much less costly.
- Reform the regulatory environment, and make it far less onerous and much less costly.

Fortunately, our efforts have not been in vain. Governments are getting our message. Revenue Canada is taking stronger action against the underground economy in residential construction and renovation.

The housing market is trying to recover right across Canada as lower mortgage rates and high quality convince more consumers to buy homes and to renovate. This fragile improvement will strengthen only if federal, provincial and municipal governments take substantive action on tax and regulatory reform.

Forum Shows Need for Strong Association

For those in the industry, a landmark survey documents how a professional approach and a pro-active Association creates a more vibrant industry.

The Builder/Renovator Forum, a joint study done by the CHBA and Human Resources Development Canada to examine professional development within the home building industry, gathered the views of more

than 600 industry members and consumers over a two-year period. The survey included interviews and focus groups with members and non-members of the CHBA, tradespeople, suppliers to the industry and consumers.

The results have now been published and I would like to share some highlights from the Forum's findings.

All of those surveyed recognized the need for professional development within the building and renovation industry. The survey found that consumer education delivered through the CHBA is seen by builders as the best long-term strategy for achieving professional recognition.

Home builders see the national and provincial levels of CHBA playing a central role in organizing and delivering effective consumer education activities. Renovators also recognize the CHBA's Code of Ethics as a key element in setting renovator-members apart in the eyes of consumers.

Tradespeople clearly prefer to work with professional builders and renovators and they see CHBA membership as evidence of a professional.

Consumers confirmed that the consumer education activities provided by local Home Builders' Association are valued. The survey found there is a real opportunity for renovators working through the Association to develop a more distinct identity within their communities.

Manufacturers and suppliers of quality building materials and products see professional new home builders and renovators as natural allies in a competitive marketplace. These respondents place a premium value on CHBA membership, both for themselves and their customers.

Among the Forum's conclusions: "The participants recognize that individual new home builders and renovators bear the responsibility for securing a professional reputation by delivering a high level of performance to their customers. At the same time, they believe that the CHBA, at all three levels, can be a tremendous resource for industry professionals."