

## 5 Energy Improvements to Reduce Utility Bills, Celebrate Earth Day

Earth Day (April 22) can provide just the motivation needed to unbutton your winter home and get it ready for warmer weather.

And by doing some simple energy efficiency upgrades at the same time, you can make a positive impact on your pocketbook, your community, and on the planet.

Here are five to consider.

1. **Whole house.** Take a close look at your house and identify where you're losing energy. Energy Star has a DIY tool (<https://bit.ly/1bDRgSE>) that helps you look at energy use in your home. You can use it to pick the upgrades that will save you the most money. If you're up for a more comprehensive assessment, consider hiring a professional (<https://bit.ly/1eV5f02>) to do an audit.
2. **Water heater.** Reduce the temperature of your water heater to 120 degrees. If you have an older water heater with an R-value of less than 24, consider using a water heater blanket to reduce standby heat losses. The \$20 blanket could save between 7 and 16 percent on your water heating costs.
3. **Bathroom.** Replace existing showerheads, faucets, and toilets with WaterSense-labeled products (<https://bit.ly/2nxd4wE>) to cut your water consumption. Also look for rebates (<https://bit.ly/2ouwKpS>) that are available in your city or state.
4. **HVAC.** Get a spring tune-up for your HVAC system and be sure to change your filter every month. Energy Star says that installing a programmable thermostat could save you \$180 per year. Learn more: <https://bit.ly/2jHqBTq>
5. **Freebies.** Check with your utility provider for incentives and freebies on things like smart thermostats, light bulbs, air sealing projects, and replacement furnaces. Search for incentives at DSIRE (<https://bit.ly/1vQmUJF>).

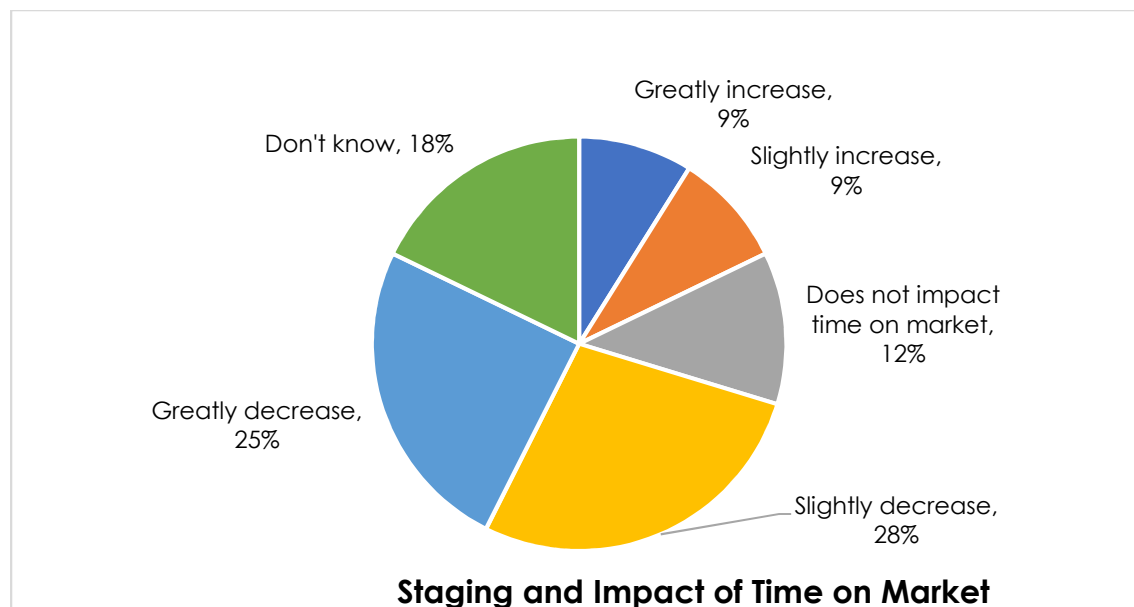
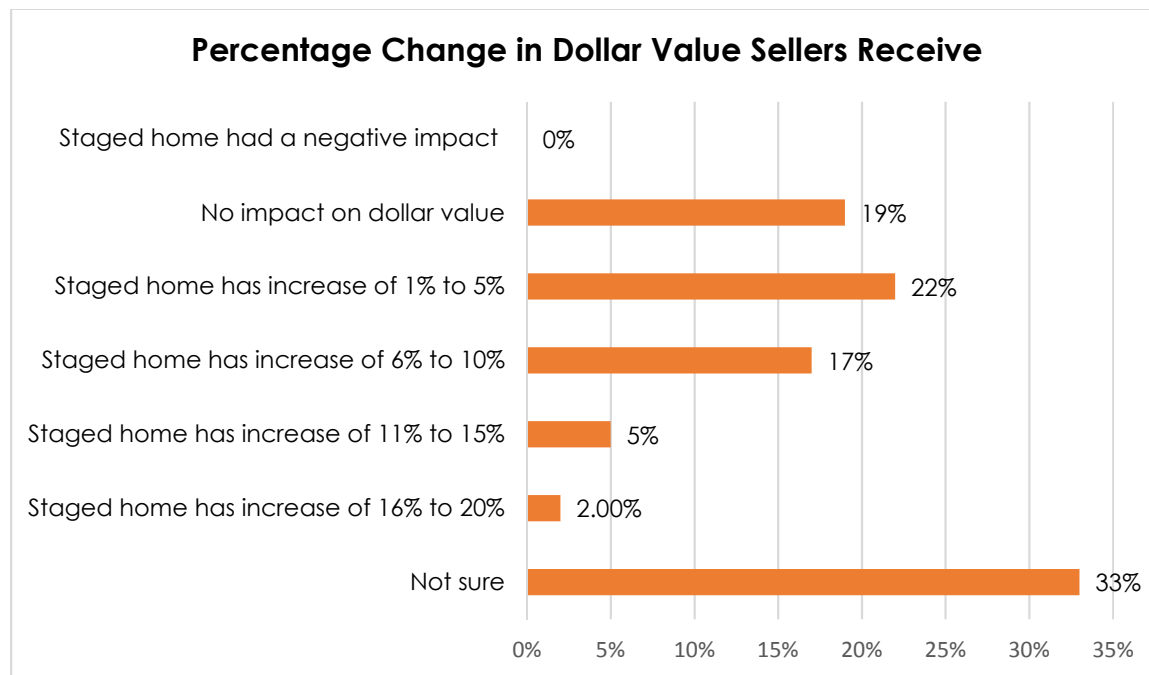
# Home staging, high expectations

Home improvement shows have raised homebuyers' expectations, according to a new report, *2019 Profile of Home Staging* (<https://bit.ly/2HGoyMa>), by the National Association of REALTORS®.

It found that 38 percent of REALTORS® who were polled said that TV shows about the buying process had an impact on their business. In addition, a median of 20 percent of buyers were disappointed by how homes look compared to homes they've seen on TV.

Staging does play a role in how long a house stays on the market and it also can boost the financial offer on a home. Twenty-five percent of buyers' agents said that staging a home increases its dollar value by 1 to 5 percent.

The most commonly staged rooms were the living room (93 percent), kitchen (84 percent), master bedroom (78 percent), and dining room (72 percent).



## Portrait of caregiving. A manageable nightmare.

Caregiving takes a physical, financial, and emotional toll, and half of caregivers spend between six and more than 16 hours a day providing care, says a Northwestern Mutual Study. Seventy-six percent had to choose between taking time for themselves and providing care and 21 percent had to reduce their work hours to accommodate caregiving.

Behind such daunting statistics are real human beings, and it's sometimes difficult to comprehend their day-to-day lives.

Neil Steinberg, a *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist provides a stark snapshot (<https://bit.ly/2HKxnnQ>) of what it's like.

He visited Bob Ringham, a former *Sun-Times* photographer, at his North Carolina retirement home.

For more than a decade Ringham's been caring for his wife of 46 years, Peg, who suffers from Lewy Body Dementia.

Steinberg portrays the immense job it takes to tend to a person at home and to cope with the physical and emotional demands of 24/7 caretaking.

It leaves little time for rest and hobbies or even a chance to get out of the house much.

Steinberg describes Ringham's situation as a "manageable nightmare" during a conversation (<https://bit.ly/2W2C1S4>) on WBEZ.

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