

Building Green - Good for the planet and the pocketbook

Building green homes is a phenomenon that's catching on slowly but surely. Offices, schools, homes, even weddings are proudly donning the Green badge.

Green or sustainable building uses resources like energy, water, materials, and land more efficiently than the traditionally built buildings we're accustomed to. As a result, this environmentally friendly building promotes economic, environmental, and our family's overall well-being.

How so? First, green homes are 25-30%, on average more energy efficient. These energy sources are an abundant, environmentally sound, and cost effective alternatives. For instance, the sun's energy can provide space heating, hot water heating, and electricity for lights and appliances.

Second, green homes can improve air and water quality by reduced emissions, particularly carbon dioxide, and by using less toxic materials.

Third, green homes improve your family's quality of life. For instance, carpet made with low-fiber materials eliminates the fibers that harbor dust mites, molds, second hand smoke, and pet dander. These "indoor contaminants" can trigger asthma attacks.

Fourth, in 1992, the EPA estimated that nearly 1 out of 15 homes had radon concentrations above their recommended level. Another EPA report cited radon as the second leading cause of lung cancer and responsible for an estimated 21,000 deaths per year. Green homes use new radon resistant construction techniques to address this issue.

Rick Tozier, owner of Sonoma Building Company in Winston-Salem, builds green and Energy Star qualified homes. "It's about doing what's right and having a vision for the future," says Tozier. Tozier's specialty is designing and constructing homes; however, he is experienced at incorporating green construction techniques into renovations as well. But, building green isn't just limited to homes. There is a rapidly growing "green building" movement across the US.

In the past, misperceptions that green or sustainable building costs more and takes longer to build caused a slow and hesitant reaction. However, a recent economic analysis study, *The Costs and Financial Benefits of Building Green*, concluded that green building can be incorporated at little increase in construction costs and the financial benefits are over ten times the initial investment.

What does this mean to us? The report specifically mentions the financial rewards of lower energy, waste, and water costs and increased productivity and health. It conservatively projects a 20-year net present value benefit of \$50-\$65 per square foot in a certified green building.

According to the EPA, buildings account for nearly 70% of the nation's electricity consumption, 12% of the nation's water consumption, and 38% of carbon dioxide emissions. Why is this relevant? Efficient use of energy, water and other natural resources helps transform our environment into a sustainable future. For example, the environment benefits from diverting construction waste from local landfills by recycling it and from conserving and restoring natural resources. And by offering more natural light and better air quality in the education environment, students benefit from safe, healthy, comfortable, and productive learning environments. Research shows that students tend to have lower absenteeism and higher achievement rates in these environments.

Green building is more than a phenomenon. It's a response to an enormous demand from people who want to do things better. Join the movement to promote environmentally responsible building and healthy places to live, work, and play. To find a certified Green Builder and for more information on how to design or renovate your new green home today, consult the National Association of Homebuilders at www.nahb.org.