



Promoting a Green Building Initiative

Builders and suppliers to the building industry must practice what they preach when promoting environmentally-responsible activities

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A famous frog said it's not easy being green and for many companies his lament rings true. It may be trendy to state that our business is environmentally responsible and on the leading edge of a movement designed to make our world a cleaner and better place. But this is one instance where we need to back up our claims with hard facts.

“Going green” must be more than a marketing ploy. The basics of reputation management involve doing good and telling others about it, but it all starts with the doing rather than the telling. Having helped clients communicate about clean air compliance for more than 20 years, we created this paper to help you understand the green building movement and how to participate in it in a truthful and convincing way.

Green Building Programs

Green building is the term used for a holistic strategy of environmentally responsible planning, design, specification, labor management, commissioning of resources and technologies, and construction of sustainable buildings and communities. *Sustainable* is the term used for meeting the needs of individuals today without destroying the resources that will be needed in the future. The concept is based on recognition of the finite nature of natural resources and long-term planning for the use and renewal of these resources.

When applied to the development of homes, housing developments, communities and cities in all aspects of construction – housing, commercial, institutional and infrastructure -- green building appears to be a very promising approach to help achieve overall sustainability.

Over the next 10 to 20 years, accelerated movement to a more sustainable approach toward living will be needed to head off environmental problems such as possible climate change, enlargement of the ozone “hole,” potential food-chain disruption and disruption of ocean fisheries, topsoil depletion and erosion, desertification and ground water contamination and more. The movement took off when the U.S. Green Building Council introduced its important Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Rating System™, a national standard that encourages the adoption of green building practices. LEED building credits are awarded based on the overall sustainable qualities of a structure.

In just a few short years, LEED has become the gold standard for green building. Today many building contractors throughout the country are embracing sustainable design and, in the process, discovering that available green building materials often don't cost much more to utilize. Suppliers to the building industry, including cabinetmakers, paint and coatings manufacturers, lighting manufacturers and others, are also embracing green manufacturing practices, helping builders achieve LEED certification and demonstrating their own commitment to sustainability.

LEED Certification Levels	Number of LEED for Homes Points Required	Number of LEED for New Construction & Major Renovations for Commercial Buildings Points Required
Certified	45-59	26-32
Silver	60-74	33-38
Gold	75-89	39-51
Platinum	90-136	52-69
Total Available Points	136	69

Source: US Green Building Council

The NAHB Green Building Program, launched by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) at its 2008 International Builder's Show, is designed to “link successful state and local green building programs with a universal online certification tool, national registry of green homes and green builders, and a wealth of educational resources.” NAHB is also sponsoring the NAHB National Green Building Conference and subsequent National Green Building Awards. In addition, its NAHB Model Green Home Building Guidelines provide details on how builders can incorporate green building concepts into their projects.

According to the organization, there are approximately 50 communities in the U.S. that employ green home building programs, just a drop in the bucket, so to speak. But with all the focus on green building programs, it's clear that sustainable building practices are not a futuristic pipe dream.

The Informed Consumer and Investor

Thirty years after the first Earth Day, consumer interest in environmentally-friendly products has never been higher. Green has gone mainstream. Politicians, celebrities and even Pope Benedict XVI have become environmentally aware, bringing the plight of the earth to the masses one speech or commercial at a time. Former Vice President Al Gore's best-selling book, *An Inconvenient Truth*, and Oscar-winning documentary of the same name, reached millions and won him the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. Such efforts coupled with scientific studies on changing climate patterns have raised awareness of green living practices to unprecedented levels.

Exaggerating environmental policies is a practice called *greenwashing* that erodes the trust of the consumer. Many a company has been accused of greenwashing, but, as a March 2007 article in *BusinessWeek* magazine notes: "companies whose story is real, compelling, and smartly-designed are the ones who are starting to shine."

More public companies are coming under the microscope of socially-conscious investors – including certain mutual funds that scrutinize business practices for ethical operations and social and environmental responsibility. Only companies meeting the investor's or fund's criteria for social and environmental responsibility are deemed acceptable for investment consideration.

Whether small and private or large and publicly-held, members of the construction industry cannot afford to damage their credibility and relationships by greenwashing. When a green initiative is adopted, it must take all facets of the building process into consideration, from supplier sustainability practices to fulfilling the expectations of shareholders and end-users.

The Attributes of a Green Initiative

Companies that are truly committed to making environmentally responsible behavior part of their culture should keep the following considerations in mind when developing their green building approach:

1. Use of Salvaged, Recycled or Agricultural Waste Content in Production

What recycled materials are used, or can be incorporated into, product production? Considerations include post-consumer recycled content, pre-consumer recycled content and agricultural waste material. Following U.S. EPA CPG recycled content recommendations is considered desirable.

2. Conservation of Natural Resources

What efforts are being made to reduce the quantity of materials required for production and to use sustainable or rapidly renewable materials? In the manufacture of wood building products, issues related to forest management and sustainability are critical.



The basic tenet of sustainable forestry is that the amount of timber yielded from a forest should be replaced at the level that the stand of trees or a forest is capable of growing without degradation of the soil, watershed features or seed source. In other words, harvesting rates and clearing sizes should not exceed a forest's natural capacity to regenerate.

Increasing environmental awareness and consumer demand for more socially responsible business spurred the development of third-party forest certification programs to protect forests from destructive logging practices and to provide a credible tool for communicating the environmental and social performance of forest operations. With forest certification, an independent organization develops standards for forest management and independent auditors issue certificates for operations that comply with those standards. At least nine forest certifications have formed internationally over the last decade.

Like the “organically grown” sticker on produce, forest certification is intended as a “seal of approval” or means of notifying consumers that a wood or paper product comes from forests managed in accordance with strict environmental and social standards. In turn, the use of certified wood is helpful in obtaining another “seal of approval” – LEED system or other independent green building certification. There is a growing trend in business to grow and use FSC-certified wood.

3. Avoidance of Toxic or Other Emissions

What efforts are made to use and/or produce natural or minimally processed products? What alternatives to ozone-depleting substances are used in production? What alternatives to hazardous materials and components are used in products/production?

Other considerations involve aspects of product production. What efforts are made to reduce pollution from operations, including air pollution, water pollution and storm-water runoff, and waste via production practices and recycling efforts?

4. Conservation of Energy or Water

In a company's manufacturing plants, what plant and production components reduce heating and cooling loads? What equipment conserves energy and manages loads? Are renewable energy sources and fuel cells used where possible for power? What efficiencies are incorporated into fleet management to maximize gas mileage and limit air pollution emissions? What plant fixtures and

equipment are used to conserve water? What is done to insure release of minimal pollutants from your production process?

5. Reducing Indoor Air Pollution

What is done to block the introduction, development or spread of indoor contaminants emitted by your products in their end-use environment? Do the materials you use encourage healthy indoor air quality or contribute to unhealthy emissions? For example, are low-VOC emitting and low formaldehyde-emitting manufactured wood products, adhesives and finishes employed? Are steps taken in design and construction to prevent excess moisture in the home from causing rot or mildew of the products you produce? Do your products help to remove indoor pollutants from their end-use environment? How do you warn homeowners/occupants of health hazards related to your products? What is done to enhance the environmental performance of your products in their end-use situation?

6. Philanthropy

What pro-environment organizations does the company sponsor or otherwise support financially? One group of note is the United Nation's run Global Compact, a voluntary organization with no membership fees launched in 2000 that is dedicated to continuous improvement in human rights, labor, the environment and corporate governance. Approximately 130 companies based in the U.S. and about 3,000 from around the world are members of the group, whose executive director recently addressed Northeast Ohio-based companies at a meeting of the Business as an Agent of World Benefit Global Forum.

Media Opportunities for a Green Initiative

Few subjects have impacted the trade and consumer building and home improvement media as much as green living. Over the last two to three years green products have gone from an occasional mention to regular monthly content on the editorial calendars of many leading magazines. The list of publications devoted solely to green products and lifestyles is among the fastest-growing publication segments. Factor in media coverage of escalating fuel costs, depletion of natural resources and overflowing landfills, and the opportunities to showcase green practices are virtually infinite.

The case study – a simple show and tell of what you've done to go green - is very popular among consumer and trade titles. Many magazines also have websites that accommodate longer, more detailed articles. Other ways to open doors to media coverage are providing quality photography and contributing to the conversation on environmental websites.

Most of the key trade publications in the green arena can be found under one roof at the Greenbuild Expo. (greenbuildexpo.com) Attending and exhibiting at

Greenbuild is a great way to build editor relationships, gain exposure and examine how a variety of products are positioned in the green marketplace. Because there are so many green publications and because mainstream publications are also covering green issues (the April, 2008 *Vanity Fair* is just one of many possible examples), it is imperative that each publication be reviewed for its relevance to your market before you make contact.

Green building and manufacturing are becoming standard practice among companies large and small. Whether your company is a builder or supplier to the industry, its approach to the environment is an important part of your business plan. By practicing what you preach, your company can have a relevant story to tell that establishes it as an industry leader.

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