

# Save money with green building materials



Written by Keith Coleman

Tuesday, 06 January 2009 13:38

While there is a perception in New Jersey that “green building” is a relatively new phenomenon, it is a concept that your local building material dealers have been working with for nearly 40 years.

Many of the veterans in the New Jersey Building Materials Dealers Association (NJBMDA) think back to the 1970s, when ecology awareness and the rising cost of oil were popular topics of discussion. Customers began asking us how to make their homes self-sustaining through the use of new and different building materials.

We were certainly impressed by those who took green building to the extreme, constructing ‘Earth ships’—homes built with old tires filled with dirt. A few of these ships still exist, amazingly, tucked along side roads in Sussex County and down in the Pinelands.

But while the 1970s was an era of some hits (and many, many misses) it required dealers to seek materials that focused not just on functionality, quality and unit price. We had to include “energy efficiency” into the mix, explaining to our customers the long-term savings of using these products, rather than just the dollars and cents on the initial invoice.

Green building has certainly experienced its growing pains over the years. There have been many attempts, for example, to perfect the solar home. And the dropping of oil prices in the early 1990s created a shift away from green building, though progressive builders kept at it and are now leading a reinvigorated movement.

As we prepare for a new decade, with record energy prices in New Jersey and beyond, we are entering a golden era for green building. The trend is projected to grow as a share of the overall residential market from just 2 percent in 2005 to between 12 percent and 20 percent in 2012, according to research presented at the National Green Building Conference in New Orleans. That’s an industry increase from \$7 billion in 2005 to between \$40 billion and \$70 billion in 2012.

This surge is coming not only from environmentalists, but from typical families who want relief

from energy bills.

Lumber remains the original “green” material, as it is cost-effective, plentiful and helps your home “breathe” throughout the seasons. There are some other green building basics that will greatly improve the performance of your house:

•“Green” Windows

The common rule of thumb is to select windows with good insulation values, such as double and triple-paned windows. Greener windows also have insulating gas (such as argon) between the panes, which insulates better than air. In addition, there are windows with special clear coatings, called “Low-e” windows, which reflect heat, as well as tinted windows that guard from the sun.

•Building Materials

Incorporating materials that are both sustainable and non-toxic is the key. Ask your building material dealer about how bamboo, cork, cotton insulation, and recycled glass countertops can lessen your impact on the environment. Other materials, such as no-VOC paints and stains, and formaldehyde-free cabinets, can help improve indoor air quality.

•Energy Saving Appliances

Homeowners should consider ENERGY STAR-rated appliances, which use 10 to 50 percent less water and energy than many other appliances. Refrigerators, air-conditioners, washers and dryers are just some of the products that are available with the ENERGY STAR label. Even simple and low-cost steps like installing a programmable thermostat can generate significant energy savings.

•Technology of the Future

Geothermal heating and cooling systems pull warm or cool air from the earth and pump it into the house for a natural HVAC system. Solar panels can generate enough electricity on a sunny day to allow you to sell power back to your electric company. While these investments involve a high initial price tag, eventually the savings will cover their cost.

Remodeling to reduce your carbon footprint and to save money-on energy costs is an idea whose time has come.

*Keith Coleman is second vice president of the NJBMDA. He is co-owner of Hamilton Building Supply in Hamilton*