

Busted! Eight Green Building Myths

Green building has come a very long way in the past few years, yet some myths still persist.

BY ROB FANJOY

Green building is no longer viewed as a passing fad or some strange notion adopted by militant environmentalists on the fringe of society. Hundreds of studies have proven the financial advantages of green buildings (residential and commercial), from reduced construction costs to lower operating costs. Even so, there are still some persistent myths that keep some in the residential construction industry from accepting that green building is proven effective and here to stay.

Myth #1: Green building is too expensive.

This is a very common misconception. Although it has been debunked many times in the past, it still lingers. "The simple fact is that there are plenty of strategies for inexpensive green building, from right-sizing the structure to optimal value engineering to reducing waste, among many others," says Alex Wilson, president of BuildingGreen Inc. in Brattleboro, Vt. and executive editor of ENVIRONMENTAL BUILDING NEWS.

Myth #2: Green building is all about material selection.

Wilson says that in the past, people equated green building with using "green materials" such as those with high recycled content, low embodied energy, no VOCs, etc. And while he says that is an important part of constructing a green building, it is still a small part of the big picture. "People are

beginning to gain a greater understanding that green building is a systems approach to the entire construction process."

Myth #3: Green building products don't work as well.

Wilson points to low-flow toilets and fiberglass insulation as typical products that continue to get a bad rap. People still think that 1.6 gallon-per-flush toilets don't work, even though the fixtures were mandated for all new construction more than a decade ago, and that inhaling fiberglass fibers can lead to cancer. "By and large, new green products work as well if not better than traditional products," he says.

Myth #4: Green Products are hard to find.

Okay, there is some truth to this one; some green products are not manufactured nationwide and can be hard to purchase in some parts of the country. But the number of green products and systems that are available has grown exponentially over the past few years to the point where there are literally hundreds-if not thousands-of mainstream green products. BuildingGreen Inc. publishes two comprehensive directories (GREENSPEC and GREEN BUILDING PRODUCTS) with performance data and contact information on just about every green product imaginable.

Myth #5: Green homes are "weird" or "ugly."

No, you don't have to build a yurt or geodesic dome and mount huge rows of solar panels to be green. The fact is that many of today's green homes are virtually indistinguishable from "typical" homes. And if you do want to go with solar power, "There are many ways to integrate PV [photovoltaic] panels that both attractive and effective," says Wilson.

Myth #6: Building a green home is too complicated.

Ron Jones is the owner of Sierra Custom Builders in Placitas, N.M., and a founder and executive editor of Green Builder magazine. In his many talks around the world on green building, he still has to address this myth. "This is a business that is about common sense, and a lot of green building is very fundamental," he says. "It all begins with a tight building envelope; the rest of it is not very exotic or akin to rocket science."

Myth #7: To get into green building, you have to sign up for some sort of program or third-party certification.

While programs such as the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED and the American Lung Association's Healthy House are terrific at garnering exposure and furthering the green movement, builders don't have to get involved with them to build green. "Those programs are great at supplying templates and roadmaps," says Jones. "But green building is really about one project at a time and a builder's and owner's will to make a better choice."

Myth #8: It's an all-or-nothing proposition.

Jones says there is often a tendency to separate construction professionals into two groups: good guys (those who build only green) and bad guys (those who don't build green at all). "That's not true," Jones says. "I bet there are plenty of people employing green technologies and techniques who may not even know it." ■

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THANK A HERO

Most of us will never know the harsh realities of war. But there are those among us - veterans of combat - who understand its horrors all too well. They have bravely risked their lives in the heat of battle, only to return home to their families bearing unimaginable wounds. Often, these life-altering injuries require extensive modifications to their homes, just to allow for day-to-day living.

Homes for Our Troops is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that builds and renovates homes for war veterans who have lost limbs, are blind, deaf, or paralyzed; or have other severe injuries sustained while serving our country.

To date, Homes for Our Troops has constructed dozens of homes for wounded veterans - homes suited to their difficult physical needs. All of this has been accomplished through the help of volunteers on job sites, as well as through monetary donations from concerned individuals, businesses and a variety of organizations.

The Garlinghouse Company is committed to supporting the mission of Homes for Our Troops. We invite you to provide your support as well. To learn more about Homes for Our Troops and to discover ways in which you can make a positive difference in the lives of these wounded veterans, visit www.homesforourtroops.org.



ABOVE: Sgt Peter Damon, of Middleboro, MA lost both arms when one of the tires of the Blackhawk Helicopter on which he was working, exploded. Here, Homes for Our Troops founder John Gonsalves, shares a hug with Peter after handing over the keys to his specially adapted new home.

LEFT: Peter Damon and his family at the construction site of their new home.

