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Green Myths

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Many homeowners including a good handful of builders and developers are still under the impression that green building is expensive. But research shows just the opposite. Then there's 'green washing,' a term that describes misleading environmental practices or false advertising of the environmental benefits of a product or service. With various myths floating around about green building, it's easy to see why consumers can get discouraged about it. Knowing the facts can help keep you from making a costly investment and allow you to take a step closer towards an eco-friendly lifestyle.

Top 10 Green Home Myths

1. Building green costs more.

Up until even two years ago building green necessitated a significantly higher upfront cost and payback took a long time. Today, however, experts find that green building requires less upfront and pays you back quicker and more. Now a green mortgage runs only 1 to 3 percent more than a traditional one. Even nonprofit affordable housing agencies such as Habitat for Humanity are finding green construction more cost-effective for their projects. A house built to the standards of the

EarthCraft program, part of the Southface Energy Institute, is almost twice as energy-efficient as one built to standard codes, according to Ted Cater, EarthCraft's manager of communications and development. That amounts to an annual savings of about \$930 on utilities, he says, which quickly pays back the higher monthly mortgage bill.

2. Going green is overwhelming and time consuming.

Going green can easily begin with an informative trip to an agency such as the Southface Energy Institute, which educates consumers and building professionals on what green means and how to build a green residence. Going green is a matter of integrating methods and materials. Staying green requires slight alteration of a lifestyle: incorporating recycling, turning off unused lamps, decreasing your reliance on air conditioning for dehumidifying and cooling.

Some of the best and easiest means to start your efforts toward eco-friendliness include surfing over to USGBC.org or its sister site GreenHomeGuide.org. The National Association of Home Builders web site for homeowners, GreenBuilding.com,

CarbonFootprint.com, Green Building Talk, and the book Green Building Products are some great resources to help educate you through the process.

3. All I have to do is use green products.

Products are only a part of a home's greenness. Green building actually begins with intangible concepts such as site orientation, properly sizing the residence and using correctly sized heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

Architects use site orientation, for instance, to allow for natural sunlight to illuminate the home, reducing the need for lighting fixtures which require electricity. The sun's warmth, through appropriately sized and placed windows, also provides a natural substitute for heating apparatus, thereby reducing utility bills.

Green homes are also properly sealed and insulated. Gaps around openings such as windows and doorways should be thoroughly sealed; otherwise they allow cool, ventilated air to escape and polluted, frigid or hot air to penetrate the home. Proper sealing and insulation eliminates pollutants that cause asthma and other respiratory illnesses.

Properly sizing a home means the owners utilize the space they have. Instead of having 3,700 square-feet of space that remain unused, or improperly used as storage space for unused items, the homeowners take stock of how they really live and build accordingly.

Properly sized HVAC systems allow homeowners to heat or cool the house on schedules, in certain areas and only as needed. These systems prevent electricity waste and therefore contribute to smaller utility bills. Contractors are using HVAC systems with higher Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating (SEERs) for ultimate efficiency.

4. Products LEED-certified are best.

Don't get green washed. No product is certified by the US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Efficiency Design (LEED) program. And architects or builders you hire to green up your home are accredited, not certified. Green products can vary. Here are some reliable sources for certifying energy-efficient and eco-friendly products: EcoLogo, Green Seal and Energy Star. BuildingGreen also offers a list of approved green products.

Another way to spot a faux green product, is by looking for what TerraChoice calls the six sins of green washing: the hidden tradeoff, fibbing, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, and the lesser of two evils. These sins often negate whatever claims or symbols are prevalent on a product or service advertised. It is useful to know these sins and how consumers are misled. Going green often seems paradoxical, so know which elements of a green lifestyle are most important and applicable to you.

5. Only use energy-efficient products.

This may seem paradoxical, but don't trash your properly functioning, but perhaps out-

dated refrigerator, washer/dryer or other appliances that are still in good condition. Disposing of major appliances before their life cycle is exhausted contradicts its sustainability. It's best to wait until it serves no purpose, then dispose of it through proper municipal outlets. When buying a new appliance – even a computer – look for the Energy Star logo.

Available at most major appliance stores, Energy Star appliances such as dishwashers, washers, dryers, microwaves or computer monitors, can save energy and water. That subsequently helps save green on utility bills. The same can be said of a house. Because your home is not as green as you would want it to be, there's no reason to bulldoze it. You can retrofit it to add new green features. Renovations are a far greener choice than demolition.

6. The green mansion.

Mansions attempting to guise themselves as green are a contradiction in nature. A 2,000 square-foot residence is by some accounts up to 40 percent greener than one that's 5,000 square feet. One reason is that the footprint on the planet is smaller. Larger homes also naturally require more energy to heat and cool. Another reason is that the space is more fully utilized according to lifestyle, not according to competition with the Joneses. Programs used to certify homes as green penalize building professionals and homeowners for having unnecessarily large homes, requiring more points to be earned to offset the size's environmental damage.

7. Green building is faster.

Town and city officials sometimes tell builders and architects – who then tell their clients – that green building permits receive higher priority and are processed quicker. While this speedy service might be nice, it's usually not the case. With any kind of permit, you have to wait in line with the rest of the bunch. Most experienced green builders and architects say that the process takes about the same amount of time, because administrators are not yet familiar with the varying elements. In addition, because of innumerable extenuating circumstances involved in individual construction projects, there is no definitive way to determine if green building is quicker.

Using certain green construction techniques such as insulated concrete panels, structural insulated panels, prefab or modular building can indeed be more expedient, but that's due to the actual construction process.

8. Computers and televisions aren't energy hogs.

Plasma TVs and computers are two of the home's most common energy suckers. Turning off a computer saves far more energy than using the sleep or hibernate modes or waiting for the screensaver to kick in. Energy-efficient monitors and computers are available. Even when turned off, flat screen plasma TVs generate heat for a reason: they're drunk on energy intake.

9. Green building is a new and passing trend.

Green is actually a word that differentiates what builders and other residential experts are doing today to generate less impact upon the environment. There was a blip of a green movement in the 1970s, which saw some families putting large, unattractive solar panels on their homes. But today's green building is really a return to what was happening naturally before World War II.

After the war, suburban sprawl brought production building and overnight development. To meet the demand, builders began producing an influx of poorly constructed, static homes, that eventually became bigger and bigger without regards to energy efficiency or the environment. But in today's changing global economy, rising energy and fuel costs have necessitated a push towards green building. Eco-friendly homes have become more than just a passing consumer trend. The movement has a relevant and practical stake in our changing world. And experts will agree that no one can overlook the need to go and remain green, no matter which shade you prefer.

10. A green home only deals with the actual house.

LEED for Homes and NAHB's residential green building program both consider the home's surrounding locale, as well as the owner's landscaping and irrigation plans for the future. Density (more homes per acre, for instance) and smaller-sized homes more easily gain certification than large homes and composting, xeriscaping, preserving native landscaping, and harvesting gray

water earn credits toward even higher certification.