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Reduce, reuse, remodel: Green remodeling solutions

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Green is no longer just a color. We hear it everywhere: green cleaning, green cars, green buildings. Green has taken on many new meanings. What does this mean for remodelers?

Looking at the big picture, the facts are straight forward. We have a fixed amount of natural resources, a growing population and a changing natural environment. Approximately 40% of world energy use, material resource consumption, and green house gas emissions are a byproduct of building construction and operation. Building, by definition, is not green. Builders and remodelers, however, can significantly reduce a project's impact on the environment.

Green building is not about spending money on trendy "green" products. To reduce impact on the environment, remodelers must identify and incorporate practical green solutions and focus on proper design, non-destructive land use, material conservation, energy efficiency, construction of sustainable structures, and improved indoor air quality.

Proper Planning is Critical

Every successful green project starts in design. Without proper planning, opportunities to maximize dollars spent on efficiency improvements, advanced framing and proper product selections will be lost. Existing materials like cabinets, trim, and framing should be identified for reuse. If a product is salvageable but cannot be used on-site, it can be carefully deconstructed and donated to organizations like Habitat for Humanity. Finally, demolition materials should be recycled.

Focus on Energy Efficiency

Improvements to energy efficiency through weatherization upgrades allows remodelers to incorporate green principles in a financially justifiable manner. A home energy auditor can conduct a whole house systems analysis that identifies inadequacies in a structure's thermal envelope and mechanical systems. An energy audit should include blower door testing and infrared imaging which identify opportunities to improve air leakage, inadequate insulation levels and underperforming heating and ventilation systems.

Choose Products Wisely

With everyone jumping on the "green" bandwagon, it is critical that the remodeler identify characteristics of truly environmentally responsible products, which include:

- * Products with recycled content.
- * Local and minimally refined products that require nominal energy to harvest, create and transport.
- * Wood certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an internationally recognized organization that promotes responsible harvesting and management of the world's forests.
- * Finishes, paints and building products that off gas little or no volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Many VOCs are known carcinogens and have significant effects on indoor air quality and occupant health.

The green building movement holds within it a profitable future for remodelers who explore building

techniques and products that yield benefits for the client and our natural environment. As the green building market develops, phony green claims will be exposed, leaving the educated remodeler to pick up the pieces. Remodelers should be positioned to provide clients with options that make sense both environmentally and financially.

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