

Energy and Environmental Features Are Making Today's Homes Greener

Did you know that your new home, apartment, condominium or townhouse is packed with energy and environmental features? The "green building" movement taking place in the housing industry represents a kind of quiet revolution, but one that is bringing decades of environmentally-friendly construction techniques and materials to new home construction.

Green building, the buzzword for eco-friendly residential construction, can take many forms. It can include land use, development and community design techniques that preserve natural features such as trees, wetlands and open space. It also can mean water conservation as well as energy efficiency in heating and cooling systems, appliances and lighting. Common building materials such as lumber used in the home construction industry are greener now since many of those materials have been recycled.

Chances are the home you recently bought was built using a number of energy and environmental advances or environmentally-friendly materials including:

- longer-lasting roofs made of durable steel and fiber-cement coverings;
- wood products known as oriented strand board that use smaller trees and parts of the tree not previously used;
- windows with insulating glass that keep homes more comfortable and energy-efficient;
- vinyl siding that has reduced the need for cedar, redwood and other wood products for exterior walls;
- increased insulation levels in walls and attics that make homes less drafty and lower energy bills;
- passive solar design that captures the sun's rays and gives homeowners 'free' heat;
- tree preservation around residences that provides shade, reduces energy costs by cooling the home and creates residential communities of lasting value;
- planting native plants that require little or no watering by homeowners and reduce water bills for homeowners in dryer climates.

These are just some of the advances the housing industry has achieved in providing greener housing choices to the home buying public. In fact, many new homes feature the following:

- appliances such as washing machines that use 45 percent less energy and dishwashers that use 40 percent less energy than models manufactured in 1972;
- plastic lumber in decks that has helped reduce the use of redwood in decks to 6.3 percent in 1999, and
- greater overall energy efficiency. Homes built today are 100 percent more energy-efficient than homes built in the 1970s. Builders and manufacturers routinely provide consumers with insulated doors and windows as well. In fact, the use of insulated glass windows jumped from nearly 68 percent in 1978 to 87 percent in 1999.

Building greener neighborhoods also means working to remove regulations that make building beautiful difficult. Builders are breaking down regulatory barriers so they can create more tree-laden bike paths, put in water-purifying ponds and lakes and ensure that pedestrian-friendly communities come with ample open space. With the help and cooperation of local government officials, we can make further green building a staple of new homes, townhouses, apartments and condominiums.