

**\*What is your definition of green?**

The expression “green” is becoming more and more politicized as well as incorrectly defined. I believe “green” is: *an active, harmonious, synergistic integration with the environment*. This definition goes beyond a single concept such as buildings or vehicular transport but instead encompasses a holistic balance between humans and their environment in all aspects. The key word in my definition is “active.” By active, I mean an essential sociological and psychological life-cycle change that is continuous. Buying a hybrid car does not make one “green,” particularly if the use and manufacturing of the automobile strains environmental resources. The notable problem with “being green” and part of the socio-economic issue is the economic and cultural disparities between industrialized and third-world countries, and formulating the harmonious and synergistic integration with the environment globally.

**\*Why did you get involved with LEED and what is your expertise level on this subject (for source validation)?**

I have been working for \_\_\_\_\_ for over 14 years, am a licensed general contractor and recently completed the accreditation testing to become a LEED AP (accredited professional). A LEED AP’s primary function is to coordinate multidisciplinary project teams for an integrated approach to achieve LEED certification. A common misconception is that “green” building design is new, but architects have been incorporating various “green” concepts, such as day-lighting, for thousands of years.

**\*What types of products do you use in place of the conventional products to be more eco-friendly?**

Specifying a specific product does not make a building “green” as a building can be looked at as a collective organism—all products should meet or exceed a minimum standard. Due to legislation over recent years, many conventional products are in fact “green” in that they are being manufactured to be more efficient such as HVAC heat recovery systems and CFC-free cooling systems. Also, the use of VOC’s (volatile organic compounds) in paints and adhesives are controlled. Furthermore, specifying regionally produced materials helps alleviate excess emissions through long-distance transportation of materials.

**\*What are these products made of that make them better?**

Actual product content will vary based on each particular product. As an example, LEED Materials & Resources Credit 6—Rapidly Renewable Materials addresses the use of materials that can be harvested within a ten-year cycle or shorter. Some of these materials may include bamboo flooring, cotton batt insulation or wool carpeting.

**\*How difficult are these products to find?**

Due to legislation and the promotion of eco-friendly construction, finding “green” products is fairly simple. The construction products industry, as with any business, runs by supply and demand. As demand for more environmentally conscious products grows, manufacturers realize the economic necessity to create such products.

**\*I think there is a stigma that green-friendly products are “uglier” than conventional ones. Fluorescent light bulbs would be an example, I think. What do you say about that?**

Aesthetics will always be a contentious issue since everyone has their own opinion as to what “ugly” is. Remember, “green” design is an integrated process that involves architects, contractors, owners, developers, and occupants working together. With input from all parties involved, a design can be developed that satisfies aesthetics as well as having minimal impact on the environment. Personally, I would question someone making a blanket statement regarding an item such as fluorescent light bulbs since technology has changed the use, style, and appearance of fluorescent fixtures. Their use for soft, ambient, task lighting can be a boon for office workers.

**\*How does building a LEED house differ from a conventional house in methods and products?**

Currently, the LEED-Homes certification program is in its pilot phase, but in my opinion, long overdue. Millions of homes are constructed every year, and the impact on the environment is considerable. Notably, homes consume 74% of the potable water use in the US. As for a LEED house differing from conventional house construction, I’ll quote from the USGBC: “Generally, green homes are healthier, more comfortable, more durable, and more energy efficient.” Furthermore, “green measures will reduce long term costs, particularly those features that involve energy and water efficiency.” Some areas addressed regarding methods and products in the LEED-Homes pilot phase under Materials & Resources include material efficient framing, environmentally preferable products (interior and exterior walls, foundation, ceiling assemblies, landscaping, roof), and waste management.

**\*What kinds of methods and products can be used for environmentally friendly landscaping that are not used for conventional landscaping?**

LEED Water Efficiency Credit 1—Water Efficient Landscaping addresses this issue. Most important is the use of native or adapted plants as water conservation is built-in and the landscaping is not reliant on equipment or water regulatory controls. Also, rainwater collection systems can be used for irrigation and irrigation can include high-efficiency strategies such as micro-irrigation systems, moisture sensors or drip systems.

**\*Do these eco-friendly methods and products last longer than traditional house parts and if so, why?**

To design and build in an eco-friendly manner is to imply a longer life-cycle. Life-cycle costs are part of the analysis for “green” building and reduced operations and maintenance can have a considerable economic impact on ROI (return on investment). Unfortunately, changing the social-economic dynamic will be needed for future construction since we live in a “throw-away” society. Why pay \$50 to fix a DVD player when a new one can be purchased for \$30 at the local Wal-Mart?

**\*What is the cost comparison between traditional and eco-friendly house methods and products?**

First-costs are almost always more for “green” houses, particularly those that utilize innovative reduction in energy generation by way of passive and active solar means. Also, building construction must be to a higher standard to avoid loss of heating and cooling while maintaining positive indoor environmental quality. Building life-cycle must be taken into consideration when factoring cost, though, when mortgage loans may be as long as 30 years. Given rising energy prices, a positive ROI can be achieved in a short time.

**\*How is construction as a whole being affected by this new interest in being environmentally friendly and protective?**

Construction as a whole is being affected primarily through legislative activity, building codes, and public perception. Currently, companies promoting their ability to meet or exceed established standards and provide an eco-friendly structure have the upper hand over traditional firms.

**\*How long do you think it will be before this method becomes the norm over conventional methods (same question with products)?**

This question can lead to some volatile arguments particularly among designers and architects. Many architects who have implemented “green” practices for decades feel the LEED process is nothing more than a money sink. Often legislation is formulated by politicians who have little or no understanding of the design and construction process and merely want a “green” mandate to appear environmentally friendly. As a whole (at least within the US), I believe that design, construction methodology, and products that are environmentally friendly will be the norm within the next 10 years.

**\*What are the environmental and personal benefits to building a home with a consciousness to the environment?**

To answer this question, we need to refer back to my definition of “green”: *an active, harmonious, synergistic integration with the environment*. Building a “green” house is one step—conscious active environmental participation must be continuous. As for the

personal benefits, many are inclusive, particularly reduced energy costs, reduced environmental impact, and improved indoor environmental quality.

**\*How will these methods/products affect energy and air quality and the overall global warming problem?**

While I believe in designing buildings that reduce environmental impact, I am not convinced that buildings alone are responsible for global warming. As with a building or living organism, the Earth undergoes its own life-cycle. In my opinion, population reduction would contribute far more to reducing global warming than technological innovations in building construction or other methodologies.