

Green Goes Mainstream

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Central Florida: 40 degrees and rainy. Not the type of climate you'd expect during a trip to the Sunshine State. Despite the bizarre weather, over 110,000 visitors attended the Homebuilders Show in Orlando. The record attendance was evidence to how large the homebuilding industry has become. It was also the perfect venue for unveiling the NAHB's Green Building Guidelines.

This four-day event introduced many Green concepts and technologies. With titles like "Profitable Energy Efficient Construction" and "Not So Big and Green, Too", green seminars have definitely grown in popularity and importance. Even the vendor's floor had a large increase in the amount of green products being offered. Suppliers of moisture protection, alternative insulating methods, and recycled construction materials had the convention center busting at the seams.

On the final day of the convention, the NAHB introduced their Green Building Guidelines. It was obvious from the response that green programs are being implemented all over the country.

The NAHB's Green Building Guidelines is actually a checklist that allows builders to create green homes and communities without confusion. It provides local HBA's with a clear reference to use when creating their green building program.

At the Bucks and Montgomery HBA we are currently evaluating the NAHB's Guidelines and customizing it to fit our climate and political environment. Ultimately, this document will be the basis for our own Green program called GreenBuilt PA.

The Green Building Guidelines has seven different sections known as Columns. Together the Columns touch on all aspects of homebuilding.

1st Column: Lot Design, Preparation and Development

2nd Column: Resource Efficiency

3rd Column: Energy Efficiency

4th Column: Water Efficiency

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5th Column: Indoor Environmental Quality

6th Column: Operation, Maintenance, and Homeowner Education

7th Column: Global Impact

The 1st Column gives credit to builders that minimize disturbance of their site. Storm water management and BMP's (Best Management Practices) score highly. Using native, drought-resistant plantings and placing trees in strategic locations, to help with shading, are major factors within this section.

The 2nd Column focuses on efficient home designs that reduce lumber cutting (and waste). Builders using panelization, pre-cut framing, and pre-engineered lumber can obtain over 50 points within this section. The 2nd column also offers points for moisture management practices such as foundation drainage systems and proper flashing. These no-brainers also protect the builder from liability and call-back issues. The use of certified recycled, renewable, and local materials round out this column's purpose.

The 3rd Column, Energy Efficiency, concentrates on HVAC and water heating as primary targets. Exceeding local and national codes can bring in plenty of points. A tight building envelope backed up with proper natural and/or mechanical ventilation completes this section.

The 4th Column attempts to help the builder construct a home that reduces water use. Installing low-flow fixtures and EnergyStar appliances meets most of this section's parameters but are not the only way to gain points in this column.

Column 5 deals with Indoor Environmental Quality. Points are given for the use of materials that are certified not to emit potentially poisonous gases as they dry. Vapor retardant barriers in the

basement, ventilation of kitchens and baths, and insulation of cold pipes are all strategies that both mitigate mold conditions and provide green points.

The 6th Column ties all the green tactics together. This section guides the builder through the development of an Owner's Manual with relevance to the homeowner. The end-user, also known as the homeowner, ultimately benefits from a green home. They must, however understand how to use and maintain the multitude of systems that make up their residence in order to assure that it performs efficiently over time. The manual serves to inform the homeowner of high performance technologies, how to manage their green home, and why their home is far superior to one of standard construction.

The NAHB's 7th column deals with the Global Impact homebuilding has on the environment. Points are given for specific products that utilize company-wide environmental management systems such as ISO 14001 or produce low-VOC paints, caulks, and adhesives.

The NAHB's recent release of the Green Guidelines after years of research and development shows that the homebuilding industry understands the importance of balancing business with environmental issues. Local HBA's can support that objective by developing their own Green Programs based on the NAHB's Guidelines. And that's just what your HBA is currently doing.

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