

5 Questions

about Green Building

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Rebecca Aarons-Sydnor



Green building and LEED are buzz words in our industry. Can you sort them out for us? Why is green building important?

Green building is designing with an eye towards a positive impact on the environment. I like to call it "high performance building" since it creates a healthier environment for the occupant, an efficient operation for the owner and a reduced impact to the environment. The United States Green Building Council (USGBC) is a non-profit organization which developed a standard for green building called the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system for designing, constructing and certifying green buildings.

Green building has grown in popularity in many areas of the United States in recent years. What trends do you see in green building for the Greater Richmond area? Is the momentum gathering here?

Green building is popular in Northern Virginia and Charlottesville, and the momentum is moving toward Richmond. I've noticed a few articles popping up in *Style Weekly* and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* recently. Additionally, Weinstein Hall at University of Richmond was certified and the local chapter of the American Lung Association designed a healthy workspace. Clients are demonstrating an interest and, once they understand benefits, they'll realize it makes great sense both economically and environmentally.

What are some of the rewards of taking a sustainable approach to commercial development?

If you follow the concept through, the rewards of green building are high. Building green is not only healthy for the environment, but it also decreases energy and water costs. Using products that improve indoor air quality leads to healthier employees which can reduce lost time and insurance costs. The government is rewarding green builders with the Energy Bill which includes tax credits for energy savings, and some areas are expediting permits allowing for increased density for green projects.

Are there added costs or other risks in building green?

Reports show up to a two percent increase in the construction costs of green projects. While the increase in construction costs is minimal, there is an increase in professional fees due to a more intense design process. There can also be increased costs in the commissioning, energy modeling and certification of these projects. However, these costs are returned through lower energy costs and increased productivity for the occupant. There really isn't a risk in green building. There's more of a risk not to, especially considering rising energy costs.

What are a few of the simplest ways to incorporate green into a design?

The simplest thing we all can do is use paints and other materials with low volatile organic compounds (VOC). Low VOC paint is readily available in stores and is comparable in price to other high-quality paints. We can also incorporate materials with recycled content and local materials such as stone. Using existing buildings saves resources as well, especially those in walkable urban areas. For new construction, think about the position of the sun throughout the day and design window sizes and placement to maximize use of natural light.

Want to know more?

For additional information about green building, contact the following:
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