



Minnesota
Office of
Environmental
Assistance

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Our homes can have positive or negative impacts on the natural environment and the health of their occupants. There are many opportunities to improve your home's health and environmental impacts during design, construction or remodeling. Below are some ideas on "greening" your remodeling or construction plans.

A **green building** is one where the qualities of both the indoor and outdoor environments have been considered and protected during its design, construction, maintenance and use.

— *Recycle Ann Arbor*

Build less: Renovate

A basic principle of green building is to build as little as necessary. Not only does new construction demand more resources, it can also contribute to urban sprawl. Consider purchasing an existing house with convenient access to public transportation, work, shopping and other services. You could also consider expansion opportunities for your current house.

Downsize new construction

A smaller house uses fewer materials and costs less to construct, is easier and more economical to maintain and heat, and leaves more yard space outside to enjoy.

Design to use less material and create less waste. Remember the carpenter's adage "measure twice and cut once." The cost of materials and disposal can be reduced by including waste reduction measures in your plans. For example:

- Use standard sizes of lumber.
- Centralize cutting operations.
- Increase the spacing of joists and studs where it is safe and within building codes.
- Carefully calculate the quantities of materials needed at the outset of projects.

Green construction

Select the right building materials

Recycled products

Purchasing materials that contain recycled content helps to support recycling efforts in your community, state, region and nation. Recycled products contribute less to global warming and reduce the demand for materials produced from scarce natural resources.

For Minnesota-made recycled products, see the online *Minnesota Recycled Products Directory* www.moea.state.mn.us/rpdir/

The OEA can provide you with a list of construction products with recycled content and Minnesota vendors. Call 651-296-3417 or 800-657-3843.

Used or salvaged materials

Used building materials are another option for saving money and obtaining quality components. There are several retail outlets that sell good quality, salvaged materials.

The Green Institute's **ReUse Center**, Minneapolis, 612-724-2608, sells reusable materials as well as manufacturers' surplus. Products commonly found there include plumbing fixtures, cabinets, windows, doors, millwork and similar items. Visit their Web site: www.reusecenter.org.

Salvage businesses can be found throughout Minnesota. They can be good sources of building items and fixtures. **Architectural Antiques** in Minneapolis, 612-332-8344, offers unique fixtures and other items that reflect "bygone times."

Duluth Timber, 218-727-2145, sells reclaimed timber, flooring, paneling, stair parts and custom millwork. Online at www.duluthtimber.com.

Include environmental attributes in contract language

You can include specifications that call for environmentally preferable materials and construction practices in contracts for your remodeling or home construction project. Construction specifications provide guidance for contractors:

- What materials are to be used in a project.
- Specific products that are to be used.
- Practices that are to be followed.
- Explaining particulars that are not readily explained in the architectural drawings.

Homeowners have an opportunity in the “specs” to identify ecologically sustainable practices and resource preferences, such as recycled, salvaged or renewable materials. Additional assistance on specifications is available from the OEA. Call Erin Barnes-Driscoll at 651-296-3417 or 800-657-3843.

Sample specification language

“...contractor shall make his/her best efforts to:

- a.) employ recycled, renewable, and previously used but structurally sound (reused) building materials wherever feasible and permissible;
- b.) minimize waste, spillage, pilferage, spoilage, and misuse of building materials;
- c.) maximize energy and water use efficiency by exceeding local energy standards in building code for site planning, thermal insulation and mechanical systems, and installing a mechanical home ventilation system;
- d.) reduce indoor levels of radon gas and formaldehyde emissions by following industry and U.S. EPA guidelines on indoor environmental quality; and
- e.) provide consumer operating and maintenance information for best performance in this project through careful planning, specification, job site management, and labor supervision.”

Source: Building Environmental Science and Technology, www.energybuilder.com/greenbld.htm

Build with locally produced products

Buying items produced in your region supports the local economy and reduces the environmental impacts of long-distance transportation.

Reuse or recycle excess materials

You can help the environment by preventing unnecessary disposal of usable or recyclable building materials.

Organizations

The following organizations accept donated materials. Call ahead to see if they are in need of the type of material you have to donate.

- **The ReUse Center** will accept many used, good quality materials. Donors receive an itemized receipt for tax purposes. Pick-up of large donations can be arranged. Call 612-724-2608 for more information.
- **Habitat for Humanity** prefers materials to be dropped off, but may also pick up from job sites. Call 612-331-4090, extension 630.
- **Project for Pride in Living** accepts some building materials. Call 612-874-8511.
- **St. Joseph’s Hope** accepts building materials for which they have an immediate need. They also accept used appliances in good condition. Call 612-874-8867.

Materials exchange

If your business or organization has usable, but unwanted, building materials, the Minnesota Materials Exchange program can help you find an outlet. Materials exchange is a free service that matches businesses discarding reusable materials with those who can use them. For more information call the Minnesota Technical Assistance Program at 612-624-1300 or 800-247-0015, or look at the online catalog: www.mnexchange.org