

GREEN Home...

What *exactly* does that mean?



BY PETER BALDWIN

Every magazine you read these days has something about green building, sustainability, LEED, and many others buzz words of the age. What *exactly* do these words mean and why should you even care? You should care because these concepts and actions positively impact our environment and will help secure a future for our children's children. The words can easily be demystified with a bit of explanation.

What does living green mean? Living green means a lot more than just living in a green home. It encompasses daily choices and practices ranging from vehicle efficiency and carpooling, to water use habits, to recycling, and even to shopping at local markets purchase to the food we eat. Electric cars and backyard organic gardens may not be for everyone, but there are simple changes we can all make to help us live more green.

Why build green? Sustainability introduces the idea of a triple bottom line—people, planet and pocketbook. Sustainable design is about balancing these three issues, which takes into account the impact your business decisions, design decisions, and product purchases have in terms of social and environmental values along with financial returns. Green homes are more energy efficient, healthy for their occupants, and sensitive to the environment. Creating a green home shows a higher level of concern for a sustainable environment. This approach to design and construction often requires some up-front costs and forward thinking in order to save on life-cycle costs. Those who chose this route, however, will be rewarded in the end.

Why certify your home? At what point can a home be called green? The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) all provide benchmarks for rating green homes. Following the guidelines in these varying rating systems is not required, but can give homeowners assurance that their new home is a particular standard of "green". The USGBC uses the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system that is very results-oriented. NAHB uses the Green Home Guidelines, which is more prescriptive than LEED and easier to manage. The EPA uses Energy Star Qualified Homes with a focus on energy efficiency. □

ABOVE: This Holland area cottage is being constructed using the LEED for Homes certification process, which is third party verified by the U.S. Green Building Council. Designed by AMDG Architects and built by Scott Christopher Homes, this home highlights the ease, beauty and affordability of sustainable projects.

The following is a list terms you might hear tossed around in reference to green building:

Green	sustainable / environmentally friendly
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design A program that certifies buildings achieving performance targets in the five green building categories. For more information, www.usgbc.org/leed .
USGBC	United States Green Building Council, (www.usgbc.org).
Energy Star	A national program that offers business and consumers energy efficient solutions (www.energystar.gov).
Low-E	Low-emissive windows minimize the amount of energy lost by limiting the transmission of heat while still allowing plenty of light to pass through.
VOCs	Volatile Organic Compounds are gases or vapors emitted by various solids or liquids, many of which have short and long-term adverse health effects. Household products that emit VOCs include paint, paint strippers, cleaning supplies, pesticides, glues and adhesives, building materials, and furnishings. Consequently, concentrations of many VOCs are higher indoors (up to ten times higher) than outdoors. Fuels such as gasoline (petrol) and diesel also release VOCs (wikipedia.org). These may contribute to indoor quality air issues.
Triple Bottom Line (TBL or 3BL)	This stands for people, planet and pocketbook. The triple bottom line approach takes into account the impact your business decisions, design decisions, and product purchases have in terms of social and environmental values along with financial returns.
Life-cycle costs (LCC)	This is a method of analyzing the cost of a system or a product over its entire lifespan. The objective of performing a LCC analysis should be to choose the most cost-effective approach for using available resources over the entire lifespan of the product or system (lifecyclecost.net).