

Is it Easy Being Green?

Is it hard to build green? Is it a lot more expensive? Do you have to live in a straw-bale cottage or some other strange building to say you're a green home owner? No, no, and most decidedly no!

The National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) Model Green Home Building Guidelines are about to celebrate their second birthday. Designed to help bring residential green building into the mainstream, the Guidelines also demystify the process and debunk the myths of green building for consumers – and for home builders.

Using the Guidelines, local home building associations are creating regionally appropriate green building programs for interested builders, and that interest is growing rapidly. Twelve state and local associations have launched voluntary green building programs, with another dozen on the way.

The Guidelines include an easy-to-follow checklist to make sure the builder is incorporating all aspects of green building into each project. That makes it easier to build green – and that's the beauty of the voluntary Guidelines.

Is it more expensive to build green? Experienced builders say it doesn't have to be. Guidelines-based programs award points for resource efficiency, and if you're using fewer materials, you're saving money, they point out. And some green building ideas – like positioning a home's windows to best take advantage of natural light – don't cost any more than conventional building – and save money for the homeowner.

Nor does green building consist of neighborhoods filled with yurts, underground bunkers or geodesic domes. When a house is green but looks like other houses in the neighborhood – and can be replicated by large-scale building companies – then we know green is mainstream. We're seeing that happen right now.

There are more green building products than ever. Easier to use insulation, chemically neutral paints and flooring and natural landscaping products are no longer difficult to find. Most home-improvement stores carry a full line of compact fluorescent bulbs, which use 70 percent less energy, and advances in solar roof panels and shingles, wind turbines, and efficient appliances make green technology less expensive than even a few years ago.

But there are scattered gray clouds on a mostly green horizon. Efforts to mandate green building are the perfect example of good intentions gone awry. Green building needs to stay voluntary to continue to allow for market innovation and to make sure that the additional money spent to build 'green' goes to building improvements, not excessive certification fees. NAHB discourages efforts to dictate and legislate what constitutes acceptable green building practices because the building science in this area is still evolving. We don't want to see this dynamic process frozen in place.

Homebuyers don't have to wait that long to learn more about being green: download a free guide at www.nahb.com/greeninnovation.