

Is it Easy Being Green?

By Tony Abreu

**President, Builders Association of Northern Nevada,
Chair of the Energy and Conservation Committee**

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, not necessarily, 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 as well as for home builders.

Using NAHB's Guidelines along with research from other successful voluntary programs around the country, the Builders Association of Northern Nevada is in the process of developing an appropriate voluntary green building program for our region. Twelve other state and local associations have already launched very successful voluntary green building programs, with another dozen on the way.

The Guidelines include an easy-to-follow checklist that assigns points for each item on the list to allow for flexibility from one builder to the next. This allows each builder to incorporate the aspects of green building that provide the most bang for the buck for each unique project. This system 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. A lot of the green building practices are actually unknowingly being used today by a good number of home builders. The guidelines being developed will allow builders to identify the green building techniques that they are already doing and show them that the path to a higher level of efficiency is not as difficult or costly as they would have thought. NAHB

Guidelines-based programs award points for lot design, resource efficiency, water efficiency, energy efficiency, indoor air quality, operation & maintenance, homeowner education, global impact and marketing. The homebuilding industry has made huge strides in building energy efficient homes in the past few years. If you're using fewer materials, less water, and less energy you're saving money.

Green building does not have to 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.

Efforts to mandate green building are the perfect example of good intentions gone awry. It is important for green building to stay voluntary and flexible to allow for innovative design. By not allowing flexibility, rigid rules will needlessly drive up costs to new homebuyers and not allow for creativity in making the most sustainable living design. NAHB and the Builders Association of Northern Nevada discourage 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. Visit the Consumer Information page at thebuilders.com where there is a link to NAHB's Model Green Home Building Guidelines – or contact the Builders Association of Northern Nevada at (775) 329-4611.