PLANT LIFE COLUMN

"FLORIDA GREEN HOMES"

Gardeners grow orchids and tropical plants in greenhouses. Floridians can grow families in "Florida Green Homes".

The Florida Green Building Coalition shared its plan to reduce pollution and encourage healthy communities through building practices at the RESNET conference in Cocoa this week. Home buyers and builders will be interested in the newly developed voluntary standards and certification program.

A Green Home is not colored green for St. Patrick's Day. Instead it is any normal looking home that is earth friendly, affordable to operate and healthy to live in. Homes meeting the "Florida Green Home" designation are not only more energy efficient than the new unified building code requires, they are also built to minimize the potential for indoor mold and mildew damage, conserve water and reduce waste during the construction process. The new designation requires verification by an independent third party trained and certified in principles of environmental design and construction practices for Florida.

Many homeowners are concerned about healthy indoor air quality, comfort and durability. Research and model construction projects have shown that these homes can be cost effective, benefit the environment and look like any other conventional home in the neighborhood. Both custom and production builders can use these techniques with proper planning and information. The voluntary standards and construction techniques have been developed to include new as well as existing homes.

Research shows that building a home to "Florida Green Home" standards increases the home's durability, provides mortgage incentives, enhances affordability and enhances profitability at resale. National studies showed approximately $1200 improved typical homes to Energy Star standards of energy efficiency. Costs vary with size and location.

Home builders benefit by reducing call backs through tighter quality control measures. The new standard provides a way to increasing market share as the homes will be labeled and easy to differentiate. Home buyers link green home features to quality and better health.

Congress is currently considering legislative language in the energy bill to provide tax incentives for verifiable energy savings. Gainesville home builders are working with government officials for reduced permitting fees and fast track plan review and permitting for homes designed using green home standards.

For several years, interested builders, architects, planners, designers, engineers, educators, agencies and consultants have been developing an easy to use scoring system and educational reference guide.

Each green feature that is included in the planning and construction process contributes points toward certification. Some actions are required for certification but for others there is a menu of choices provided so the most appropriate actions can be used and actions that are not practical do not count against the total.

Green home features include simple considerations such as extending downspouts to 3 feet beyond the building. Builders also get points for discharging condensate lines from the air conditioner to more than 2 feet from the building or 5 or more feet from the drier vent. While these practices are more stringent than current code, they are recommended to reduce termite damage.

Credit is given for smaller home size since space efficiency and conservation of building materials are encouraged. Remodeling an existing structure gets the applicant 10 points since it reduces the amount of site prep work and no additional land is being used.
The points also provide incentives for practices that reduce damage from wind and flooding. Lowered garage floor, soil sloped away from the building and finished floor at least 12 inches above 100 year flood zone all receive points. These practices are easily incorporated into our standard building practices.

Hurricanes are a concern here in Central Florida and points are available for measures that reduce wind damage. A safe room, braced gable ends or a hip roof provide 2 points each. There are many other construction practices and techniques that consumers and builders may want to consider.

Education is a major goal of the Florida Green Building Coalition. The voluntary program is designed to provide incentives to encourage recommended construction practices. Much time has been spent in researching construction practices that will benefit consumers, provide marketing incentives to builders and protect our environment.

More information is available online at http://floridagreenbuilding.org or contact the Florida Green Building Coalition at 1-321-638-1450.

Note: RESNET members work toward promoting energy efficiency financing and home energy ratings. For more information please visit: http://www.natresnet.org.

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