



Green Home Building Programs (Frequently Asked Questions)

What is a “green home?”

A green home is one that generally meets high levels of energy efficiency and water efficiency and its design has been thoroughly reviewed on many facets which range from site utilization and landscaping to the selection of materials, finishes, appliances and lighting. Most standards focus on new homes but in some programs renovated homes can qualify as well.

Why would someone want a “green home?”

- Lower operating costs resulting from the energy and water efficiency aspects of the design.
- Tax incentives and rebates offered by electrical utility companies and the Federal Government.
- Increased health and comfort from the features that control humidity, reduce chemicals exposure and improve air exchange and filtration.
- Higher re-sale value.

What are the basic criteria for a green home?

The criteria vary slightly from program to program but the key areas include:

- Lot design, preparation and development
- Resource efficiency
- Energy efficiency
- Water efficiency
- Indoor air quality
- Operation, maintenance and homeowner education
- Global impact

Many programs specify mandatory and optional design characteristics in each category. A home can qualify for various levels of “green home”

status depending on how many optional characteristics are achieved beyond the mandatory ones.

Who administers or oversees these green home programs?

There are over 30 state and local programs out there as well as two nationwide programs. The National Association of Home Builders launched their Green Home Building Guidelines and certification program in 2005 and the US Green Building Council set out their residential green home standard in late 2006.

The mechanism varies among the programs to qualify a home, but typically a builder applies to the overseeing body prior to construction to have his plans approved. In some programs there will be one or more inspections or performance tests required during construction or at completion which must be passed for the final certification to be issued.

How long have these programs been around?

The earliest certification programs came about in the early 1990's.

What role do cabinets play in a green home?

In the overall qualification program, cabinets play a very minor role in determining a home's “green” status. The few aspects that cabinets can help earn points on are in terms of construction and impact on indoor air quality.

- The composite wood materials can earn points if they are made from recycled wood fiber or agrifiber. They also can earn points if the binders and adhesives do not have formaldehyde in their formulation.

- The hardwood can earn points if it comes from forests that are certified under one of the recognized sustainable forest management programs or it is recycled or recovered from use in prior construction. For example if the wood for the doors and front frames was milled from old beams recovered from a demolished building.
- The finishing materials used can qualify for points if they are low VOC formulations.
- The cabinets themselves can earn points if they are made near the home's site reducing energy consumed in transportation to the job site.

Can our cabinets help a home builder qualify for "green" status?

It depends on the program the builder is qualifying the home for certification under. In some programs our products can earn points but in others they can't. The applicable program would have to be identified and researched to determine the potential points MBCI cabinets could earn.

Most programs are written requiring the use of materials that are not available for high volume cabinet production. Wood from certified forestry programs or re-milled from demolished buildings is available in very limited quantities. Composite panels made without formaldehyde resins in the binders are not widely available or economical. Plywood is being available but only in limited quantities right now.

Are there really many homes being built under these programs?

At the recent NAHB Green Building Conference in St. Louis industry professionals expect to see green building certifications on 40-50% of all new homes built by 2010. This compares to an estimated 2% of homes built in 2005.

Related topics:

KCMA ESP
Formaldehyde

Resources for further information:

www.NAHB.org
www.usgbc.org