

Industry Analysis

Build Today / Save Tomorrow?

BY STEVE USLE

With the cost of energy and concern for the environment dominant topics of discussion within the building and design community, one could expect that every proposed residential or commercial building project is proactively scrutinized for available energy savings opportunities and its impact on the environment. In most cases, an owner's focus will involve balancing project requirements with budget realities. Regardless, an awareness of how building processes and material selections impact current and future maintenance costs and each project's effect on the environment is an important starting point in preconstruction analysis and planning.

An owner's sensitivity to environmental issues and concerns should not lead him or her to take a nonsensical approach regarding cost. Often, the most practical building solution is not the one considered technologically sophisticated or novel. In the case of energy efficiency, the approach may be more conventional in nature. Sometimes, there's a good reason why things have been done in certain ways, or why a specific material is specified. For example, fiberglass insulation installed properly can be very effective. Cellulose or foam insulation can provide better resistance to air penetration, and may be a more expensive way to achieve the fiberglass R-value. There are always trade-offs in every material selection process. The most effective starting point may be a process that considers the effect of a project design and specified materials on total energy requirements. Of course, this examination always occurs within the context of an established budget. This may mean specifying good, but not excessive, insulation levels for the building envelope, proper design load for heating and cooling, and energy efficient appliance packages. It can also mean integrating such things



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as daylighting, passive solar heating and natural cooling elements into the project.

Trumbull-Nelson's Home Project Division Manager Jim Forcier works with many owners who are adding to or renovating their residences. Jim is an adherent of "green" building and energy-efficiency technology in construction, but indicates that clients are driven by a number of factors when considering a building addition or renovation.

"Most clients are mindful of the overall project cost and will decide where their money is most effectively spent within the context of the construction budget. We work closely with clients to measure costs and to analyze potential benefits of alternative material selections, as well as energy saving technologies."

Without question, energy saving products and "green" design options are plentiful and always worth exploring. Today, the level of understanding and knowledge about available options by both the contractor and client is significant. A great opportunity exists during the early stage of construction planning for the builder and client to research, explore and choose building products that accomplish project goals. □