

Home Improvement Corner

How To Figure Out What's Green And What's "Greenwash"

(NAPSA)—The greening of America no longer lives on the fringes of homebuilding and renovations. According to the 2007 Green Homeowner SmartMarket™ Report, homeowners are now using green products for 40 percent of their remodeling work.

It's little surprise that marketers are eagerly satisfying our growing green conscience with hundreds of new or relabeled products espousing their resource-saving, material-reducing ways. It might come as some surprise that these new green options have been met with a healthy level of consumer skepticism.

A poll of more than 1,200 U.S. homeowners, conducted by Ipsos Reid for Icynene, found that 70 percent believe that when companies call a home-building product green, it is usually just a marketing tactic.

Many Shades Of Green

Why are homeowners so cynical? To start, there's no clear and widely accepted standard for what is green and what's known as greenwash—the labeling of not so eco-friendly products as green.

So how do you gauge what's green?

You can start by accepting that there are many shades of green. Giving thumbs up or down to a product based solely on its renewable content, for example, might ignore its potential for helping us reduce our reliance on resources or for making our homes healthier.

Well-known television home-improvement expert, Jon Eakes, examines six high-profile areas for home construction or improvement to show why gauging green can involve a little give and take:



Insulation that seals air leaks can lower energy bills by up to 50 percent.

Carpeting

Carpeting made from natural fibers or flooring made from renewable cork might be a popular green option, but will they hold up as well as man-made materials when used in high-traffic areas of the home?

Paint

Will paints labeled as eco-friendly or containing low or no levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) stand up as well as conventional "nongreen" paints? Beware of paints offering insulating abilities (or R-values) in heating climates. Consider if the future removal of paint or wall coverings will require the use of hazardous chemicals.

Kitchen counters

Natural marble counters can add beauty and resale value to your home and may seem to be a

greener option, but how much energy is used in transporting marble imported from overseas? Look for natural materials that can be sourced locally.

Insulation

Consider more than what the insulation is made from. Look for one that will create an air barrier to air leaks and energy loss. Consider if it will resist settling or shrinkage over time that can lead to air leaks. Ask if it will help resist airborne moisture that can lead to mold growth. Will it keep out allergens? Does the insulation off-gas or contain formaldehyde? For more help visit www.InsulationSmart.com.

Landscaping

If you're considering landscaping work, know where bricks or stones are sourced to minimize energy use in their transportation. Look for plants that will require less water in their maintenance. Consider trees that can provide shade (and cooling) for your home.

Furniture

Consider the source of materials used in furniture construction. Did they come from sustainable woodlands or other renewable sources? Consider the various types of glues and finishes involved in furniture manufacturing and their VOC off-gassing.

With a little effort and some common sense, you can do a lot to reduce your environmental footprint.

Questions To Ask Before Going Green

1. Will the product labeled as green work as well as "nongreen" options and withstand wear and tear in your home?
2. Will the product help save energy, water or other resources?
3. Will the product help your home be healthier?
4. Where was the product made and how much energy was used to ship it?
5. What impact will the product have at the end of its life and can it be reused or recycled? (T)