

'Green' Construction on Leading Edge Rather than Bleeding Edge

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The Oklahoma State Home Builders Association recently adopted a new national initiative encouraging all Oklahoma home builders to begin building "green."

As a result, homebuyers should begin seeing changes in construction of Oklahoma homes.

Michael Herndon of Kingston, president of the Southern Oklahoma Home Builders Association which includes Marshall County, comments on this initiative and how it will impact the buyer.

Q. Is building "green" going to increase the cost of my house?

A. Yes. Experts tell us to expect an average increase of 4 percent in the price of the home. However, the efficiency of the system pays off in the long run. If the home is not built in a haphazard manner - with air leaks and moisture traps - almost in every instance, there is a net positive to the consumer. A better term than "green" is a systems-based approach, taking a look at not just the mechanical piece of a home, but the design, from the foundation up. A well-built home is less about the materials and more about the way the installation was handled and the "envelope" in which the home is wrapped.

Q. What does it mean to have a 'systems-based approach' in home construction?

A. Most builders in Okla-



Michael Herndon

homa pour the foundation on sand, which if not done properly can trap moisture in a reservoir. Water then absorbs into the foundation and into the home's carpeting, causing mold and mildew. Experts say a better start would be to use one-half inch gravel under the foundation with a vapor barrier on the concrete floor. It can take up to a year for a slab to dry. It's a novel idea and can be more costly due to labor and materials but, as a homebuilders association, we'll research these ideas and adjust our practices and guidelines accordingly.

If you cannot control simple things like moisture, you have possibly wasted money on efficient equipment you will be putting in the house. Ventilation products are also extremely critical.

Build the homes tight, ventilate them right. Energy efficiency has everything to do with air infiltration.

Q. Are you finding home-

buyers interested in the energy-efficiency initiative in building a home?

A. Some people just don't care. They just want a home to look nice. Some prefer a double-crown molding instead of a quality air-conditioning system. However, when it comes to "green" construction, sometimes the customer knows as much as you know.

Q. Why is it important to a consumer to consider renewable and energy-efficient aspects to a home?

A. Homes are not like cars. You can't trade a car in and get another one. We just can't junk one house if it doesn't work. We are building houses to last 100 years.

You can make it look good all day long, but if you don't look beneath the slab, as a builder, your credibility is gone. You have to supply the best product that you can for your customer, and that best product is the most energy efficient product. Sometimes, the customer has to give up the crown molding.

Q. Where can I go to learn more about green building?

A. The state Department of Commerce website is one of the best and equipped with informational videos: www.bestofbuildingscience.com. To view a list of Certified Builders statewide, go to www.oshba.org, the website of the Oklahoma State Home Builders Association. This year, the state association endorsed stringent national guidelines by the National Association of Home Builders Green Building

program. Soon, the national association will announce it is the only green building program certified by the American National Standards Institute, which makes for a true third-party certification, setting the gold standard for all programs for consistency.

Q. Recent news indicated Oklahoma is No. 1 in the country in home value gains, while much of the rest of the country is down, according to the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight Home Price Index. What do you make of that?

The reason? Two strong markets - Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Tulsa ranked 10th among metro areas while OKC ranked 17th. Our prices are still increasing, so if you don't buy now, the price is going up. This is good news for Oklahoma. It affirms what we have been saying all along. We did not have the overheated market and did not have the investor-speculative market. Slow and steady still is our pace.

Q. What does it mean to be a Certified Professional Builder and should this certification give comfort to a prospective homebuyer?

A. Being a Certified Professional Builder means the builder has taken a certain number of required educational courses. They must have been a member of the home builders association for at least two years.

In addition, they have to keep up with continuing-education hours. All certified

What Does 'Green' Building Mean?

Below are some areas the consumer should review with the builder to ensure the building materials are making their product truly "green:"

- Products made with salvaged, recycled or agricultural waste content, such as rubber flooring made from recycled tires, shingles from PVC scrap or iron-ore slag for mineral wool insulation.

- Products that conserve natural resources, such as concrete pigments for attractive finished floors and slate shingles.

- Products that avoid toxic or other emissions in the manufacturing process, such as natural stone, rigid foam insulation and fluorescent lamps with low mercury levels. Mercury contaminates waters and soils when disposed. Termite barriers or bait systems can lessen the need for pesticide treatments. Masonry fireplaces burn fuel-wood more completely with fewer emissions than conventional fireplaces.

- Products that save energy or water, such as those that reduce heating and cooling loads through insulation, water heaters and refrigerators, dishwashers and clothes washers. Toilets and shower heads that conserve water

- Products that contribute to a safe, healthy built environment, such as toxic concentrations in the paints, caulks and adhesives. Coated ductboard compared with standard rigid Fiberglas duct board helps control mold growth. Highly reflective ceiling panels can be used for day-lighting systems.

(Source: Building Green Inc./courtesy Oklahoma State Home Builders Association)

home builders have to carry a minimum of \$1 million in liability insurance, and provide a written warranty with every house of no less than one year. A home built by a Certified Builder means the construction has to meet minimum standards and all

building codes. The builder must adhere to a code of ethics set forth in state association bylaws. Buyers can go to www.oshba.org to view a list of Certified Builders statewide or go to the Southern Oklahoma Home Builders Association website at www.sokba.org.

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