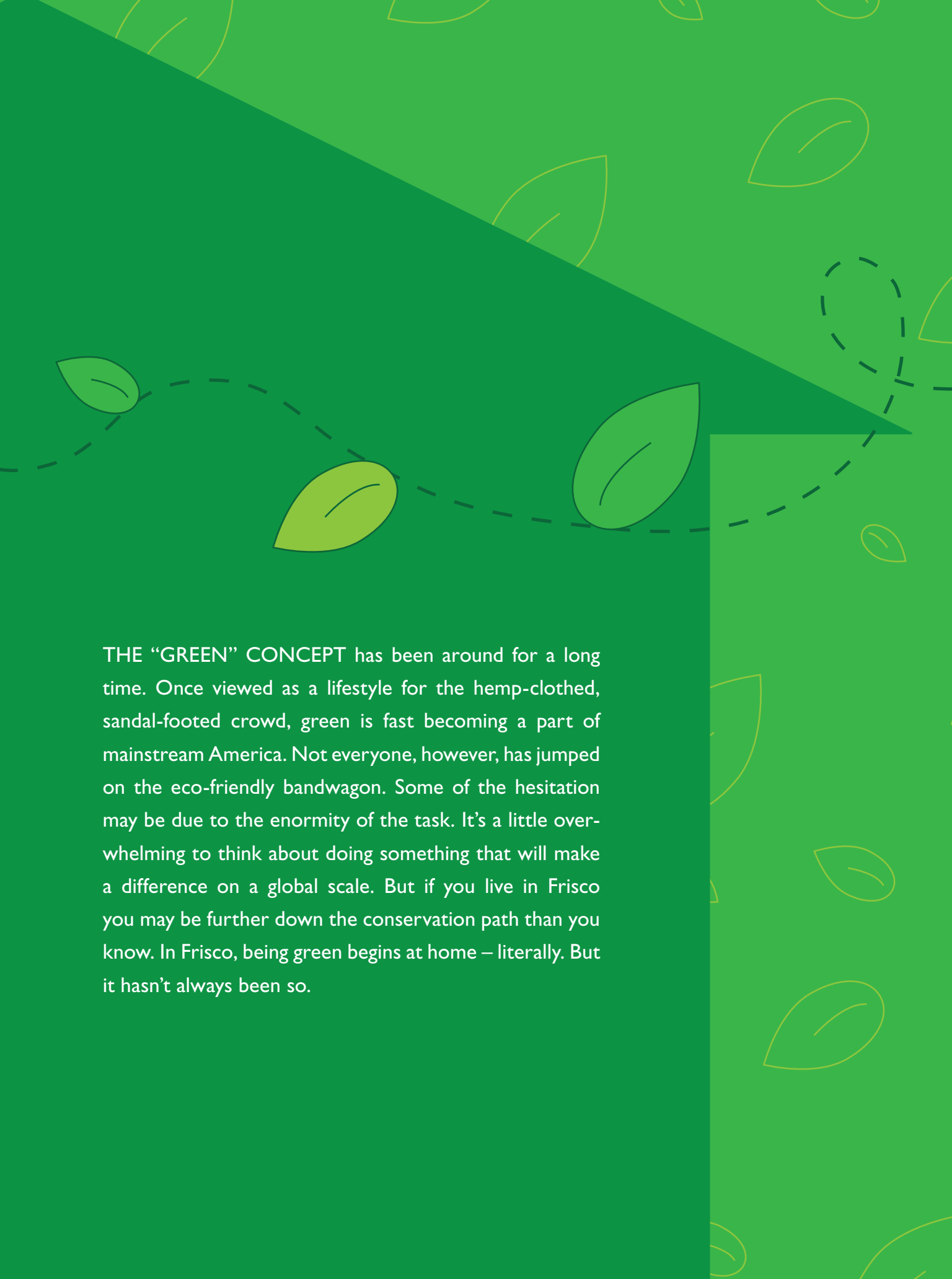




building a
GREEN
HOUSE

by Terry Denkhaus

The background is a vibrant green with a diagonal split. The upper-left portion is a darker shade of green, while the rest is a lighter shade. Scattered throughout are stylized leaf outlines in a light green color. A dashed white line curves across the middle of the page, with several solid green leaves placed along its path. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, set against the darker green background.

THE “GREEN” CONCEPT has been around for a long time. Once viewed as a lifestyle for the hemp-clothed, sandal-footed crowd, green is fast becoming a part of mainstream America. Not everyone, however, has jumped on the eco-friendly bandwagon. Some of the hesitation may be due to the enormity of the task. It’s a little overwhelming to think about doing something that will make a difference on a global scale. But if you live in Frisco you may be further down the conservation path than you know. In Frisco, being green begins at home – literally. But it hasn’t always been so.

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*Jeff Witt and John Lettelleir –
pioneering planners
photo by Chris Frichie*

Eight years ago, Jeff Witt, Frisco's comprehensive and environmental administrator, along with other city leaders realized that Frisco was in the path of a tsunami of people looking for a better place to live. As the wave washed over the area during the next few years, new neighborhoods sprang up where there once were cotton fields. That's not a unique story in the metroplex. What is unusual is the way Frisco city planners handled the growth.

"At the time we were trying to figure out the best way to minimize the environmental impact of all this growth," says Mr. Witt. He and John Lettelleir, now director of planning and development services for the city, attended a conference at the University of North Texas where they heard home builders talk about energy efficiency. An idea was born.

They thought it was a great idea because we could put all this to rest once and for all. So we let them pick the houses and we tested them. The result? Every one of them failed.

"What they said made sense; so I worked up a proposal on the benefits of building with energy efficiency in mind. I showed it to the director and then presented it to the city council. They told us to see what we could do with it."

In January of 2001 Mr. Witt's proposal was brought before a committee of local builders who were invited to be a part of the process of developing the new pro-

gram. The builders all thought it was a great idea but insisted that they already built energy efficient homes. "We said, 'well, why don't we test your homes?' They thought it was a great idea because we could put all this to rest once and for all. So we let them pick the houses and we tested them." And the result? "Every one of them failed," Mr. Witt chuckles.

"There was one gentleman on the committee, a custom builder, who was so confident in the work his crews did that he had his personal home tested," says Mr. Witt. "I called him the day after he got the results back and he said, 'Jeff, I'll be at the next meeting and you'll have my full support. But right now I've got every one of the contractors on my

house standing in my front yard.' He was handing out copies of the test results and telling his people that they were going to fix all this. And he was serious!"

By May of 2001 Frisco became the first city in the United States to require all new homes comply with a Residential Green Building Program. As Mr. Witt stepped away from the podium after the city council passed the measure into law, he was handed a phone. On the line was a reporter from National Public Radio.

"There was a guy from NPR on the phone waiting to interview me. And he said, 'how's it feel to be the first mandatory green building program in the nation?' He said, 'y'all just did the impossible.' I told him that if he had told us





High tech tubing eliminates the need for much of the copper used in new home construction. (left); Bamboo floors and oak doors are part of the eco-friendly design. (right)

photos by Chris Fritchie

before we did it that it was impossible, we probably never would have tried it!"

Under the ordinance adopted by the city council the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Homes Program would be the minimum requirement for all new homes built in Frisco.

For a home to earn the Energy Star label it must use less energy for heating, cooling and water heating than a home built to the new Texas residential energy efficiency building code. Homes are tested and inspected by an accredited rater to make sure they comply. The bottom line is that the least efficient home built in Frisco since May of 2001 is 15 percent more efficient than those built to meet the standards set by the Texas building code.

What does that mean for homeowners? Better and tighter construction, improved comfort and air quality, lower utility bills and, potentially, better resale value than homes elsewhere.

While the building codes adopted in Frisco are more eco-friendly than other cities, some builders are taking energy efficiency to a whole new level.

Jim Sargent, long considered the "god-father of green," started building energy efficient, environmentally friendly homes in 1975. "The only people who called me then were the tree-huggers. I started long before it had a name," says Mr. Sargent.

If I build a home that uses a lot of energy, somewhere in Texas they're going to burn a lot of coal or split some atoms to produce the energy for that home.

"I gave up after three years. I told people that I've got kids to send to school." So he went back to building what he calls "pretty" homes. "Then I realized I was part of the problem and not the solution. If I build a home that uses a lot of energy, somewhere in Texas they're going to

burn a lot of coal or split some atoms to produce the energy for that home."

Mr. Sargent renewed his commitment to build energy efficient homes. From 1985 to 2000 he monitored the utility bill of every house he built to see what was working and what was cost efficient.

Then, in 2004, at the Dallas Parade of Homes, his company, Anderson Sargent Custom Homes, unveiled an example of what going green is all about. The home, built in Frisco's Lone Star Ranch, won "Best Overall Design" and "Overall Favorite Home" on the tour that year, but what was more important to Mr. Sargent was its designation as a "zero-energy" home.

The zero-energy designation is reserved for homes which produce enough energy on their own to offset the energy they consume. Everything has to be considered when building this type of home, according to Mr. Sargent, starting with where the home sits on the lot. Depending on its orientation it's possible to negate the sun's effect on the interior of the home on a hot Texas afternoon. Over the course of a year, it's possible for solar



Jim Sargent found controlling the attic environment enables greater energy efficiency. photo by Chris Frütche

panels on the roof to supply nearly all of the home's electrical power, at times even putting power back on the grid, causing the meter to run backwards.

Surprisingly, the biggest hurdle to overcome in building a truly green home within the buyer's budget is convincing the customer to consider scaling back on the size of the house, according to Mr. Sargent.

"The first thing we do when people come to us is try to show them that they don't need such a big house. I try to get them to think smaller because small is the number one thing. You use less material and have less impact on the earth."

In the "green niche," as Mr. Sargent calls it, he usually talks to people who think they need to live differently than they have in the past. "They want to have less impact on the environment, but they need to understand they don't need a different room for every little thing."

Being one of the standard bearers in a fledgling industry started to pay off years ago, and as more and more people start thinking 'green,' it stands to reason that things are only going to get better for Mr.

Sargent and others like him. "We just had the best year we've ever had!" he says.

According to Craig Brooks, the best is yet to come. Mr. Brooks is the Dallas division president of Burgess Construction Consultants and a member of the board of directors for Green Built North Texas. "A significant portion of the demand for green building is consumer driven," he says. "Approximately 70 percent of all new home buyers say they would be more inclined to purchase a green home."

What really bodes well for Frisco homeowners is what Mr. Brooks and the industry predict for the immediate future. "It is forecast that by the year 2013 \$40 to \$70 billion will be spent on green homes. And if you look at the overall marketplace, you will find green making a significant impact in most every segment." According to Mr. Brooks, 40 percent of homebuilders say it is easier to market green homes in today's slow economy. "The green building programs that are verified by a third party (like Energy Star) provide effectiveness and affordability," says Mr. Brooks. "They pro-

Bringing Energy Savings to Light

A FEW TIPS THAT CAN SAVE YOU CASH. As of 2014 the incandescent bulb will have gone the way of the eight track tape. As part of the energy bill signed by President Barack Obama last month, the bulb will be replaced by the compact fluorescent lamp (CFL). The CFL is much more efficient than the incandescent bulbs we've all used most of our lives. The CFL can last six to 10 times longer. Although fluorescent and compact fluorescent lamps are more expensive than incandescent bulbs, they pay for themselves by saving energy over their lifetime.

Discarding the incandescent bulb isn't a problem, but when it comes time to throw out the CFL, there are special precautions to take. Because of the mercury contained in the curly bulb, they must be disposed of by a professional. The easiest way to take care of the burned out bulbs is to collect them in a safe place such as the garage. Then when you have several to get rid of, take them to your local Home Depot or Lowes for disposal.

Another caution: if you break a CFL, leave the house quickly, opening doors and windows on your way out. The vapor emitted by the mercury in the bulb is dangerous to your health if inhaled.

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The Harrell family, like most of Beth Johnson's clients are energy conscious which is why they bought a home in Frisco. (Mark, Diane and Ethan Harrell with Beth Johnson)

photo by Chris Fritchie

vide great homes that are reducing the consumption of electricity and water. They are providing better indoor quality and wiser use of material.”

So what has all this meant to Frisco residents? Here are some quick statistics supplied by the city:

- 12,162 Green Homes/Energy Star Homes built since May 2001
- Average utility savings per house per year = \$436 or more
- Carbon dioxide (CO₂) avoided = 28,823.94 tons
- Nitrous oxide (NO_x) avoided = 82.46 tons
- Sulfur dioxide (SO₂) avoided = 89.55 tons

The statistics suggest that the average Frisco home, built after May of 2001 is saving its owners money and helping the environment. Another benefit of the mandatory energy codes in Frisco concerns resale value. Although after a move most people say, “Never again!” the fact is the average homeowner moves every three to five years. Given the choice of buying a home built before the new energy standards were put in place or one built after which one are they most likely

to choose?

Beth Johnson is a Dallas realtor who specializes in “green built” homes. In fact she was the first Realtor in the world to earn the accreditations for both Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and EcoBroker. She also serves on the board of directors for Green Built North Texas. Remember those old E.F. Hutton commercials? “When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen?” Well, that’s Beth Johnson when it comes to building green.

“When you’re looking at resale seven to ten years from now, you could have a white elephant on your hands if you’re not Energy Star rated,” says Ms. Johnson. “And in the future, buyers are going to be very energy conscious.”

Because energy efficiency is her area of expertise, Ms. Johnson says, most of her buyers come to her with an energy efficient mindset. “My comment to them is, ‘you can’t go wrong with Frisco.’ There is an ease to searching for a home there because of the credibility and the comfort level that it provides for buyers to know that pretty much every home is Energy Star or more.”

“Nationally,” adds Ms. Johnson, “they are finding that homes that were third-party certified at some level of green are selling faster and at more dollars per square foot, than the non-green comparable, even in this market. As much as everybody is hurting in the building industry, those that are building green are hurting less than their non-green counterparts.”

You can’t go wrong with Frisco. There’s an ease to searching for a home there because of the credibility and the comfort level that it provides for buyers.

That bodes well for Frisco, with energy efficient homes making utility bills lower; resale value is higher than in other areas. That doesn’t mean, however, that homeowners should become complacent. It’s



important to be aware of the impact the current generation is having on the ecosystem and what it will look like for succeeding generations. Steps can be taken to help ensure a bright future.

For starters, if your home was started before the ordinance of May 2001 took effect, you can retro-fit some green features without draining your bank account. For instance, it's almost a given that your duct work is a major source of leakage. Have your home tested to make sure the structure or "envelope" is tight. Reseal or replace the windows. Add insulation. Upgrade the mechanicals (i.e. furnace, air conditioner, water heater). Switch to programmable thermostats if you don't already have them. Replace old commodes with the new water-saving versions.

Outside your home, landscape with plants native to the area and which require less water when dealing with the legendary Texas sun. Add mulch to flowerbeds so they maintain moisture for a longer period of time.

It's hard to estimate the amount of time it would take to recoup your investment on the recommended changes, but

you don't have to wait long to see the savings in lower utility bills. There are utility company rebates to take advantage of as well as tax credits that could soon be available.

No conversation on green building in this area is complete without mentioning Pat Lobb Toyota, the first green LEED certified car dealership in the U.S.

With the new administration in Washington, Ms. Johnson sees an opportunity for green to go mainstream. "I'm more optimistic now than I have been in probably 30 years," Ms. Johnson says. "We have dire circumstances on the financial front, but I think throughout history, those are the times when big changes

can happen."

"We've got in excess of one million foreclosed properties sitting there on the ground that the government has a financial relationship with in one form or another. So if it's our tax dollars involved in this, why don't we get a rater (someone who tests the home for energy efficiency) in to assess the home. Let's get the appropriate upgrades made that are cost effective for that particular home in that particular area, and then put in on the market."

There would be a boost to the local economy if residents were to take these steps, according to Ms. Johnson. First, the work would provide much needed employment opportunities for local workers. Also, most of the products used are manufactured in this country, and, in theory, the newly "green" homes would sell faster and for more money than they would without the upgrades. "We could literally be saving the planet, creating jobs, and whoever ends up owning that home is paying less money to the utility company and putting less coal in the air that creates the greenhouse gases that



Even the restrooms at Pat Lobb's Toyota dealership tout cutting-edge eco-friendly technology. (far left); Recycling rubber from old tires (center); Air conditioning condensation and rainwater are captured for future use. (right) photos by Chris Frichie

green building. At Pat Lobb Toyota the air conditioning system is designed to suck a tremendous amount of moisture out of the building and maintain a proper balance of fresh air pumped in from the outside.

Air isn't the only thing that is recycled at the dealership. The exterior panel walls are made of 95 percent recycled aluminum. The concrete contains 20 percent fly ash recycled from coal residue to strengthen the concrete and increase reflectivity creating a much cooler site. The upstairs carpet is made from a corn derivative and the downstairs carpet is made from recycled automotive window glass. The wood ceiling in the lounge is 45 percent reclaimed waste wood, and the ceiling tiles consist of recycled paper and old ceiling tiles.

And finally the landscaping is made up of native Texas plants that require low maintenance and little water. Trees and shrubs are strategically placed with shade in mind.

According to Stephane Burress, community relations manager for the dealership, "A growing segment of the population prefers to do business with us because we're green. People will actually drive past other Toyota dealerships because they want to buy from us."

So having a green building can be a smart business move, returning a 20-30 percent monthly savings when compared to more conventional lighting, heating and air conditioning options.

It should come as no surprise that there is a green commercial complex on the way in Frisco, according to Jeff Witt. "There is a whole development going in at Custer and I21 on the Frisco side that is going to be LEED certified."

Almost a decade after Jeff Witt and John Lettelleir first brought up the idea, Frisco is a community that in many ways is the beneficiary of forward thinking leaders who planned for environmentally responsible growth.

Terry Denkhaus is a freelance writer living in Frisco.

hurts our lungs," Ms. Johnson says.

No conversation on green building in this area would be complete without mentioning Pat Lobb Toyota of McKinney, the first green LEED (the greenest of the green certifications) certified car dealership in the United States. If you want to see the future of green, it's worth the trip.

Every aspect of building green has been taken into account. The energy component includes low E windows that are designed to maximize the use of natural light which reduces the need for artificial interior lighting. In addition the building has a multilayered roofing system that creates a kind of ice chest enclosure over the building.

Any building that earns the LEED label

is going to include a water component as well. Here they have a water cistern with a capacity of 8660 gallons. It captures water from the condensation generated by the 12 rooftop air conditioning units and seven interior units, as well as rain from the rooftop collection system. There are also high efficiency water fixtures, dual flush toilets and waterless urinals that save approximately 40,000 gallons of water per year per urinal. A closed-loop recycle system for the car wash saves more than 66 percent of water normally lost in traditional car washes. The total monthly water bill tells the story: for December 2007 it was \$557. That's 3000 car washes at 18.5 cents each!

Indoor air quality is another component that is measured when judging a