

December 13, 2007

Lumberyards, material suppliers get green

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Image courtesy of Evolution 1

NUMEROUS GREEN certification programs consider products, finished buildings and people. But LBM Journal, a national publication for lumber and building material dealers, noticed its readers were being left out of the loop.

Now, the Lakeville, Minn.-based journal has developed a Web-based certification program to teach building material dealers and lumberyard workers the basic science of green building, and how they can help customers looking for green resources.

The Certified Green Dealer Program is based on online information sessions that discuss everything from mold to roofing to air sealing. A lumberyard or material dealer gets certified by paying a fee and having 75 percent of its sales personnel pass tests after watching a series of online training videos. After, the lumberyard or dealer can brand itself as a certified source of information about green building techniques and products.

The program concentrates on science, offering tips and suggestions on how lumberyards or material dealers can use greener practices in their own work, and recommend practices and types of products to clients. It does not recommend any specific product and is not affiliated with any standards-setting organization like the U.S. Green Building Council.

John Wagner, manager of the program, said the goal is to give lumberyards and material dealers a general understanding of green building. The central point is that there are more options in materials now, and many of them are low- and non-toxic products. The program isn't designed to push any specific agenda or theory, but instead educates on various possibilities and techniques.

“We're not just saying ‘buy cladding from this company because it has a lower carbon dioxide footprint,’” Wagner said. “We want people to see the (building's) health as a system ... in the context of the house as a thermal envelope. As a durable product.”

Durability of a building

Durability is another focus of the program.

“You can make the greenest house in the world, but it's not very green in the end if it has to be trashed every seven years,” Wagner said.

The program shows how properly considering different layers of a building can give it a longer lifespan by reducing problems that would require material or system replacements. Many of the strategies are basic building science techniques.

For example, the program talks about how moisture in a home causes mold. Mold creates an unhealthy environment by reducing indoor air quality and can shorten the lifespan of the house. Replacing materials, such as walls, increases the amount of embodied energy to keep a house usable and the chance that it will be remodeled or demolished. So, making sure moisture doesn't get into a home is important.

One way to do that, according to the program, is by choosing a drainable building wrap instead of a typical building wrap. The drainable wrap, combined with flashing systems, will manage moisture that gets behind the wrap by draining it out, reducing the risk of

mold.

20 minutes to green

The program is also very detailed in a short amount of time. The “What Green Means” session, for example, discusses the definition of green, the difference between green and sustainability, identifying a green product, embodied energy, lifecycle costs, green building certification systems, certification systems for products and green-washing.

If you're a novice in green systems, that's a lot to understand in 20 minutes. Wagner agreed that the videos give an “enormous” amount of detail, but said the program's purpose is to provide so much information that some of it will stick in a novice's head. Viewers can also learn by repeatedly watching the video, and can watch videos with customers, if customers have specific questions.

The information will help people become “conversant in green” so when a contractor asks about a product or certification, he or she can use the videos as a resource.

John Amor said the program has already helped his company do that. Amor is president of Great American Building Materials in Kansas City, Mo., a siding, window and door distributor. The company has distributed Energy Star appliances for some time, but Amor wanted to know more about green and the science behind it so he began searching for an educational system a year ago.

He couldn't find one that fit his needs.

“The other green programs that were available to me were all directed to home improvement contractors and that isn't what we do. So as far as I was concerned, none of the education out there (was) directed at people like us.”

Amor's company was the first to sign up for the program and the first to complete it. The certification is important, he said, because plenty of companies “spout green” but his employees actually did the work, learned something and now can talk intelligibly about green processes.

Knowing about green systems in general has also pushed him to want to know more about the green products he carries. Already, Amor said he has had better conversations regarding green glass coatings for windows.

“We're just trying to become experts at our little niche,” he said.

The future of green

The program was launched at the end of November and 40 lumberyards and material dealers have signed up. Wagner said 500 companies have expressed interest and he expects to have that many signed on by February. Two of those companies are in

Washington.

Rick Schumacher, editor and publisher of LBM Journal, first thought of the certification. Schumacher quoted a recent McGraw Hill survey that found green building would be a \$40 billion-\$50 billion market by 2010.

“A \$50 billion green building market within three years represents a huge jump in spending on green building components from the \$7.4 billion expended in 2006,” he said. “(Dealers can) position themselves to take advantage of this emerging market by offering high-margin premium green products.”

But aside from benefiting from an expanding business, knowing about the market could also help material dealers and lumberyards provide their customers with better information.

Dunn Lumber in Seattle bills itself as an environmentally conscious lumberyard and three of its yards are FSC certified.

Bill Jones, manager of the product team at Dunn, said having green products is virtually required in this region. “There's an awfully sensitive consumer base in Seattle that are really focused on green and it's pointless to ignore that,” he said.

But, Jones said there is “a really large void” in the ability of people in the industry that work at the counter to speak intelligently about green systems. Because of that, sometimes it takes a while for a contractor's questions to be answered.

Jones said Dunn would look at the certification closely, but another issue is the dichotomy between green products and very high-end ones. The problem is that people who can afford very green systems also want the highest-end products. Sometimes, he said, those two are at cross-purposes.

The program costs \$899 per dealer location for the first year and \$599 yearly per location after that. That fee is reduced for volume purchases of more than 50 dealer locations.

For that fee, the dealer gets unlimited viewing rights to the education training sessions and gets educational materials. For more information, visit www.certifiedgreendealer.com.

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