

# Renovations Don't Have to Harm the Environment

## *How to reduce home improvement project waste*

**T**he home improvement industry has grown considerably over the last several decades, as homeowners increasingly took steps to turn their homes into personal oases. But such projects often produce substantial amounts of waste, negatively impacting the environment as a result.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, an estimated 170 million tons of building construction, renovation and demolition-derived wastes were generated in 2003, a year when the housing market was thriving and homeowners were not shying away from costly home improvement projects. With the housing market once again on the rebound, the home improvement industry figures to benefit once again. There are steps eco-conscious homeowners can take to reduce waste while improving their homes.

**Save salvageable materials.** Some materials simply must be discarded when making improvements to a home. But many more materials can be salvaged. When making renovations to a home, separate materials like lumber, hardware, fixtures, and even appliances that can be salvaged from those materials that must be discarded. Many communities are home to organizations that collect salvageable materials, and these materials can be reused by fellow homeowners or other organizations down the road.

**Speak to contractors about recycling.** Contractors working on a home typically know which materials can be recycled in a given area. When discussing prospective projects with contractors, homeowners can mention their willingness to recycle materials. Wood is a versatile material that can be turned into reclaimed or composite wood products, including decks or other items used around the home. Old wood being removed from a home may even work as mulch, which homeowners can spread around their yards to add aesthetic appeal and protect plants on hot summer days. Even asphalt and concrete

can be recycled into new products, and homeowners should discuss their wishes to recycle as many materials as possible.

**Choose recycled content building materials.** Another way to reduce home improvement project waste is to make use of other homeowners' discarded materials. Recycled content building materials are products that include materials recycled from previous projects. These once-sparse materials are now commonplace, and labels often include the percentages of postconsumer and recovered materials used in each product. Materials such as drywall, insulation, kitchen countertops, glass tiles, carpeting and carpet padding may include recycled content, and the growing popularity of such products has made them relatively simple for homeowners to find. When working with contractors, homeowners should emphasize their desire to use materials made from recycled content. Such materials are both pleasing to the eye and the environment.

**Embrace adaptability when designing a new home.** Rarely do homeowners design their homes with renovations in mind. When building a dream home, homeowners do not consider the likelihood that they will one day move out or even outgrow the home. Estimates vary considerably with regard to how long the average homeowner stays in his home, with some suggesting as little as seven years. While data collected from the United States Census Bureau within the last decade suggests that roughly half of all homeowners had lived in their homes for at least 10 years.

Homeowners building new homes should expect to one day move, and ensuring their new homes are easily adaptable is both financially sound and eco-friendly. When a home is built with adaptability in mind, prospective buyers won't have to make costly overhauls. In addition, homes built to facilitate future renovations won't produce

the same amount of waste as homes that are less easily adapted.

Many homeowners embrace home improvement projects as opportunities to turn their homes into private sanctuaries. But those who do so with the environment in mind can significantly reduce waste and still end up living in luxury. ①

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