

Green Product Choices

Overview

Whether you are shopping at a small local specialized store, or a big, all-inclusive building material supply store, the range of products and materials can be overwhelming, especially when trying to make environmentally responsible choices. Increasingly, third party certifications are making it easier to quickly identify building materials and products that have been vetted and given a stamp of approval. By familiarizing yourself with these certifications, you can make more informed and reliable green product purchasing decisions.

Definitions

Greenwashing - False claims that a product is greener than it really is. Beware of marketing hype and packaging design that suggest green attributes without proof. Third party labels help guard against greenwashing.

When is This Applicable?

Just about any home project means that you'll be buying materials or products at some point along the way. Often times you can repurpose or reuse materials you already have on hand - better for your

pocket book and a more resource-efficient approach - but inevitably you'll likely end up shopping online or in stores for at least some of what you need. Whether you're doing the work yourself or hiring a contractor, this shopping guide can help prioritize products that are better for you and better for the environment.

What Makes it Green?




When you purchase products that use fewer resources, save energy, last longer, and don't contain harmful chemicals, you're getting immediate savings in your pocket from operational efficiencies, cutting down on future replacement costs and hassle, and minimizing or eliminating negative health impacts. Being an informed shopper can save you time, hassle, money and rework. Additionally, product choices can earn you points in Built Green and LEED for Homes and help meet requirements for Northwest ENERGYSTAR Homes.

Best Practices




The table on the next pages provides you with important information to consider and labels to look for when you are shopping for various products.





PRACTICAL SHOPPING GUIDE

When shopping for...	Consider the following...	And look for these third party logos...
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixtures: Consider repurposing your own fixtures or looking for used fixtures that can be fitted with high-efficiency LED or CFL lamps. Many salvage or second-use stores carry fixtures that can work with modern lighting, while also adding character to your project. See Resources for Salvage Stores. • Select either CFL or LED bulbs for long lasting and energy saving lighting. • Choose bulbs with the right light ‘temperature’ for your needs – a warm white will feel more like an incandescent, while a cool white will have a brighter, daylight-like feel. • Choose bulbs based on the total delivered lumens (light output). • Not all fixtures are dimmable, and not all light bulbs/lamps are dimmable. If you desire dimming, ask for the most appropriate fixture/lamp combination that can meet your needs. 	 
Appliances <i>Please refer to the High Efficiency Appliances Green Sheet for more information.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose ENERGY STAR certified air purifiers, clothes washers, dehumidifiers, dishwashers, freezers, refrigerators and water heaters. • Consider tankless (point-of-use) water heaters to avoid standby and transmission heat loss and to save space. • Choose front-loading washers, which are generally more energy and water efficient than top loading, and also use less detergent. • Pick the appliance size that meets your needs – going larger takes up more space, costs more money, and typically uses more energy. • Consider a high efficiency induction stove. If you have natural gas, select a model that has an electric ignition rather than a standing pilot light to reduce indoor air pollution and wasted resources. 	




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Paints & Coatings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think ‘less is more’: consider using minimal or no finishes. • Use low- or no-VOC paints. • Look for the GreenSeal label to ensure the product has been tested for performance and environmental and health safety. • Alternatively, consider a GreenGuard certified product. These have also been evaluated for low emissions and indoor air quality. • Avoid polyurethane products that contain isocyanates. 	
Wood products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for salvaged products first. • If purchasing new wood, choose lumber products certified through the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) to ensure sustainable harvesting and land management practices. • For composite wood products, such as oriented strand board (OSB), medium density fiberboard (MDF) or particleboard, make sure there is no added urea formaldehyde (NAUF) in the adhesive binders. 	
Cabinets & Countertops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using a salvaged item rather than traditional laminate countertops. • If choosing wood/laminate products, choose NAUF products, especially those that are SCS-certified to be NAUF. 	



When shopping for...	Consider the following...	And look for these third party logos...
Flooring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using minimal or no additional flooring products, such as polished or stained concrete. • Prioritize hard surface flooring over carpets. Carpets trap dirt and allergens, which are hard to remove and can then contribute to poor indoor air quality. • If you do install carpet, choose products certified by the Carpet & Rug Institute under their Green Label program which have low emissions and provide better indoor air quality. • If using resilient or hard surface flooring, look for the FloorScore label, which indicates the product has been tested and approved for low emissions. • Consider a GreenGuard certified product. These have been evaluated for low emissions and indoor air quality. • Avoid vinyl (contains PVC) flooring entirely. Due to the severe environmental impacts, especially near where PVC is produced, the use of PVC should be minimized where possible. • Make sure all adhesives used are low- or no-VOC. 	
Siding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider fiber-cement siding with recycled content. Although it requires a significant amount of energy to produce, it performs very well over a long time, often with a 50-year warranty. • Prioritize products with very long warranties and those which need less maintenance or additional products applied. • Avoid vinyl siding. Due to the severe environmental impacts, especially near where PVC is produced, the use of PVC should be minimized where possible. 	



When shopping for...	Consider the following...	And look for these third party logos...
Decks & Fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using salvaged products rather than new materials. • If pursuing a new wood product, choose FSC-certified wood. • Prioritize wood that is more resistant to rot or wood that doesn't need frequent coatings or treatment. • Consider a wood alternative, such as composite products which contain a high amount of recycled plastic and wood. • If you use pressure-treated wood, ask suppliers for their greenest alternative and follow instructions for careful handling and use. 	

Resources

For the complete King County Green Building Handbook and individual Green Sheet PDF files, please visit our website at: <http://kingcounty.gov/property/permits/publications/greenbuild.aspx>. For additional information, please email dperwebinquiries@kingcounty.gov or call 206-296-6600.

See these related DPER Green Sheets (GS):

- Advanced Framing, GS Number 9
- What To Do with C&D Materials, GS Number 8

Ballard Reuse: A used and salvaged building materials super store.

King County's **EcoCool Remodel Tool** (see the card by the same title in this Green Building Handbook) provides helpful hints by each room of the house and also contains a Materials Checklist.

EPA's Choosing Green Materials and Products:

This website provides background information about choosing products as well as numerous additional resources and links.

EarthWise Architectural Salvage: Architectural salvage & used building materials resource center.

Green Building Supply: This site provides numerous investigations related to green washing

LED Lighting Makeover Takeover: Home Depot Shopping Trip

Second Use: Salvaged building materials, deconstruction and salvage services company.

The Habitat Store: features building salvage materials and donation pick ups from your next project.

What Makes a Product Green: This article from BuildingGreen.com walks through descriptions of numerous product attributes and what to look for when choosing products.

