

NEW JERSEY TECHNEWS

WHAT'S NEW IN NEW JERSEY?

Green Buildings: An Idea Whose Time Has Come



The Mack-Cali building at 20 Commerce Drive in Cranford – winner of the Energy Star Award.

BY ROBERT P. SOBOL

America celebrated its first Earth Day over 30 years ago. Earth Day was conceived to help people become more conscious of our environment and to focus on the increase in pollution and the depletion of our natural resources. With the cost and supply of energy on everyone's minds lately, more companies are recognizing the benefits of buying or leasing office space in "green buildings."

A green building, also known as a "sustainable building," is best described as a structure that is designed, built, renovated or operated in an ecological and resource-efficient manner. The idea behind green buildings is two-fold. They not only reduce the negative impact to our environment by using energy, water and materials more efficiently, but they also improve employee productivity and overall health by providing better air flow, more natural light, and a more pleasing work environment.

One of the leading organizations in this movement is the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). The USGBC describes itself as a "coalition of leaders from the building industry working to promote buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work." When designing and constructing a green building, the areas of particular attention by USGBC members are energy efficiency, water conservation, materials preservation, and indoor air quality.

Developers of green buildings use energy more efficiently by capturing the sun's energy with solar panels and reflecting the heat of the sun with reflective glass. Using lightly colored roofing can reduce heat buildup on the roof, thereby helping to reduce air conditioning costs. Lightly colored roofs also last longer because they do not expand and contract with changes in outside temperature as much as darker colored roofs.

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Builders can save water by designing more efficient landscaping, which includes drought-tolerant plants and efficient irrigation systems that take advantage of run off rainwater. Water usage and expenses can be dramatically reduced by installing water-efficient toilets and plumbing fixtures, as well.

With second-hand smoke a hot topic, improving indoor air quality in office buildings is of great interest to employers. Developers of green buildings are striving to accomplish this by improving indoor air circulation and eliminating the use of paints and cleaning solvents that use volatile organic compounds or VOCs. Chemicals containing VOCs have been known to cause eye and respiratory problems. Green building developers are also installing carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide detectors to help monitor or detect these gases.

Mack-Cali Realty Corporation, one of the largest real estate investment trusts (REITs) in the country, is doing its part to make its buildings more environmentally friendly and energy efficient. According to Jeffrey Grant, PE, CEM, director of Corporate Energy for Mack-Cali, many of its buildings have been designed or improved as a result of the N.J. Smart Start Buildings Program, a statewide energy-efficiency program available through New Jersey's electric and gas utility companies designed to offer incentives to landlords for upgrading their properties with high efficiency equipment.

"Mack-Cali's goal is to minimize energy consumption through best operating practices and specifying energy efficient systems," said Grant.

Commercial buildings consume about 17 percent of all energy used nationally and, as a company aware of energy costs and environmental benefits of energy efficiency, Mack-Cali is proud to have received several EPA Energy Star Building awards for buildings in New Jersey and New York. The energy star program was developed by the EPA whereby buildings are ranked based on specific building use characteristics, climate and energy consumption. The Energy Star Award is presented to buildings that rank at or above the 75th percentile in energy efficiency of buildings throughout the nation.

With skyrocketing energy prices and changes in our climate making headlines, many feel that constructing energy efficient green buildings is a concept that is long overdue.

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