

2009 Minnetonka Eco Fair Session

Greening Your Home and Yard

With the “greening” of just about everything, how does one know what choices to make? Where are the best places to find out competent information?

The panel presentation was moderated by Dean Elstad, city of Minnetonka recycling coordinator with presentations by Ronn Jansen from Live Green, Live Smart Builders and Kris Hageman, recycling and waste reduction consultant.

It focused on things you can do and choices you can make in and around your home and yard to “green up your property”.

Ronn discussed green building and remodeling, using examples incorporated in The Sustainable™ Home built last year in Minnetonka. Green building practices and products have been around for quite awhile but are finally becoming more available and more affordable. And more architects, designers and builders are aware of and using green building procedures and products.

One of the first things a homeowner should consider is getting an energy audit of their home, available through a local utility company. This will provide a list of priorities and actions to improve the efficiency of the heating and cooling of a home, whether it is a new efficient furnace and air conditioner, new efficient windows and doors, caulking and sealing gaps, more insulation or upgrading to Energy Star appliances. Look for the EPA Energy Star seal when purchasing new appliances and electronics. Ways to reduce costs include using a programmable thermostat, lowering the heat in the winter, and raising the cooling setting in the summer. A four degree lowering of the thermostat can save 5% of heating costs. Put seldom used appliances on a power strip that can be switched off to save on the “phantom electricity” costs for the led control panel lighting. Turn off lights when leaving a room. Pay attention to water usage. There are more ideas in the Resource List.

Kris Hageman discussed looking at one’s purchasing practices; paying attention to the packaging on purchased products; recycling, especially in nontraditional areas like a bathroom; reducing one’s waste; starting weekly organics collection; and paying particular attention to the cleaning products and chemicals one uses in the home and the yard.

More products designed and claiming to be green and less toxic are available and make it easier for homeowners to make green choices. Reading labels of products before purchasing is a good habit to get into. The labels of household products containing hazardous substances must bear at least the following information: Signal Word - The signal word "DANGER" on substances which are extremely flammable, corrosive or highly toxic. On those substances which are highly toxic, the additional word "POISON" must be included. The signal word "WARNING" or "CAUTION" on all other hazardous substances. Look to avoid products with “danger” and “poison” if at all possible.

Car pool if possible or consider public transportation or biking; plan your trips so errands are on the way, not special trips. Keep vehicles tuned up and check tire pressures monthly.

Here is a Resource List of some helpful web pages for green building, energy savings and waste and toxicity reduction. This is just a start, there are many more resources available if you search them out.

Resource List for Greening Your Home and Yard – Eco Fair 2009

The color green has become closely associated with a healthy environment. Therefore, “living green,” “green products,” “green business,” “green building,” and similar tags indicate activities related to positive environmental goals.

Green: qualities or actions that have little to no negative effect on the natural environment and usually have a positive effect on the environment.

This is just a partial list of some helpful web sites. Many of these sites have additional links and resources. Your own search on “green living” and other “green” topics will lead you to many more.

www.livegreenlivesmart.org (great resource lists)

www.livegreenlivesmartbuilders.org (The Sustainable House™ – 3502 The Mall, Mtka.)

www.commerce.state.mn.us (energy, weather stripping, solar, wind power information)

www.pca.state.mn.us/oea/greenbuilding/index.cfm (site for Minnesota Environment magazine)

www.naturalbuilthome.com

www.livinggreen.org (Living Green Expo–5/2 & 5/3 State Fairgrounds, livinggreen365 e-zine.)

www.reduce.org (tips to reduce waste at home, at work, while traveling)

www.recyclemoreminnesota.org

www.rethinkrecycle.org (metro county-wide site, formally Green Guardian)

www.hennepin.us (hhw, green monthly e-mail, A to Z Guide, resources)

www.greenerchoices.org (Consumer Reports web site.)

www.thegreenguide.com (National Geographic web site.)

www.startribune.com/newhouse (green home built by staffer – in Homes section of Sat. paper)

www.epa.gov (Energy Star, green building, energy, efficiency, lots more)

www.xcelenergy.com (order a home energy audit, energy use information).

www.xcelenergy.com/Residential/SaveEnergy_Money/Pages/Save_Energy_Money.aspx