

# Can America Afford Not to Go Green?

Courtesy of MCA



To find out more about MCA Chicago, visit [www.mca.org](http://www.mca.org). To learn more about green building, visit the green contractor Website of the Mechanical Contractors Association of America at [www.greencontractors.us](http://www.greencontractors.us).

**A**ccording to a national survey, America's current financial slowdown could threaten to put green building on a back burner. But top officials with a Chicago-area construction association believe that America's flagging economy gives the business community a perfect reason to pursue green building with even greater determination.

The CMO Survey, recently released by Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, states that "As the economy tightens, marketers report that their firms have a weaker emphasis on 'marketing that is beneficial for society' and that 'minimizes the impact on the ecological environment.' "

"That trend could apply to both green products and green building," said Dan Bulley, senior vice president of the Mechanical Contractors

Association (MCA) of Chicago and executive director of the Green Construction Institute. "In the case of green products, a financial slowdown could shift the priorities of consumers, causing them to switch to less expensive brands that are not green. But

applying that same shift in priorities to green building would have long-term negative results for businesses nationwide."

Stephen Lamb, executive vice president of MCA Chicago, stated that cutting back on green building efforts during a financial slowdown illustrates the definition of a false economy. "Such an action might save money at the beginning, but over a longer period of time, it will result in more money being wasted," he said.

## Going Green Saves Green

When it comes to green building, how much does going green actually cost? The study "Costing Green: A Comprehensive Cost Database and Budgeting Methodology" compared the square-foot construction costs of 61 buildings pursuing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification to those of similar buildings without green goals. Taking into consideration climate, location and other variables, the study determined that for many of the sustainable projects, aiming for LEED certification resulted in little or no impact on the budget.

"Green buildings require intensive planning to ensure optimal results," Bulley said, "but that additional effort is worth it, when you consider that operating costs will be substantially reduced for the life of the facility."

According to the Green Building SmartMarket Report 2006, energy represents the single largest controllable operating expense for

office buildings, typically contributing as much as a third of a building's variable expenses. The report adds that the commercial office building industry in the United States spends approximately \$24 billion annually on energy costs, and that a 30 percent reduction in energy consumption, or \$7.2 billion, is readily achievable by improving building operation standards.

MCA Chicago officials took control of their own building operation expenses this year by moving their headquarters from a downtown high-rise to a green building in the suburb of Burr Ridge, Ill. MCA Chicago is striving to receive LEED Gold status for its building, and Bulley noted that their new headquarters will save on energy expenses in numerous ways. "In lighting expenses alone, the building is projected to save 30 percent," he said. "Artificial lighting is one of the major consumers of energy in any commercial building."

In addition to saving energy, green buildings can increase productivity by providing a superior work environment. According to the Indoor Environment Department of Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, the nationwide value of improved office worker productivity that would result from providing a better indoor environment is an estimated \$20- to \$160-billion.

## Other Benefits of Green Building

Not only does green building have long-term financial benefits, Bulley noted, but it also has other benefits that meet the needs of various sectors of the population. "Most people can see why green building has gained the support of environmentalists," Bulley said, "and we are witnessing a growing investment from corporate America. Those who are conscious of national security realize that it reduces our dependency on foreign oil. To an increasing number of city administrators, it means doing the right thing for the public they serve."

Bulley added that currently, all of Chicago's public buildings must be constructed with green standards in mind. Also, cities such as San Jose, Austin, Los Angeles, Portland and Seattle, among others, mandate that municipal buildings of more than 10,000 square feet must meet LEED standards. "It is realistic to suppose that someday, all public works projects nationwide will need to be green," he said. ■

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