

"It's not easy being green... still"  
Stephen J. Andros, AIA/FCSI/CCS/LEED-AP

Green building got its kick start a half decade ago with the introduction of LEED by the USGBC. Of course, there were many individuals and companies that professed the sustainable building mantra before that time and these individuals continue to push the envelope. But what about the rest of the architects, engineers, contractors, suppliers and owners that still haven't jumped on the bandwagon? Unfortunately, those individuals that haven't accepted that sustainability is just as important as the cost estimate or the final bid act like an anchor that slows the growth to "doing the right thing."

The March joint meeting of the AIA and USGBC in Las Vegas featured Greg Franta of RMI/Ensar as their speaker. Greg is one of the front runners in the green building movement. He proposes that green buildings are "wise investments" and "elegant design." Unfortunately these types of descriptions often fall upon deaf ears.

We were reminded in this presentation that we are continuing to use up that last bit of the oil available to us on this planet. Rocky Mountain Institute has published a book about this topic entitled "Winning the Oil Endgame" and this book is available for download at [www.rmi.org](http://www.rmi.org). I haven't yet read the book, but Greg stated that one of the items identified in that book is that half of the energy used today is directly related to buildings, NOT transportation. If we make cars and SUV's TWICE as efficient, we can save an additional 3.5%... but if we made our buildings twice as energy efficient, we could save 25% of the oil being used. Stop a second and let that soak in.

Another point made by Greg is that we continue to create urban heat islands with our current building. He stated that Phoenix is now 12 degrees warmer than its surroundings. Perhaps that's one reason that people are flocking to the suburbs... to get cooler! Of course, they take the heat island effect with them by building new roads and roofs with low emissivity.

Another book that Greg suggested is titled "Collapse." In this book, which describes the rise and fall of ancient civilizations such as the Hohokam, deforestation is identified as one of the causes of the death of a civilization. Again, pause and think about how we are using our tree resources. Perhaps a paperless office is a way to maintain our civilization!

It was stated that currently 2.5 pounds of construction waste are created per square foot of new construction. Doesn't sound like much. But, that's a TON per 800 square feet or TWO TONS for a traditional tract home. That's TOO MUCH. We need to use our resources more wisely instead of putting 4,000 lbs. or more of precious, non-replaceable materials into the landfill every time we build a home.

The final thought presented was that "Nature doesn't compromise... Nature optimizes." The idea of "green building" is to make our construction more in tune with nature. We all LIKE nature, don't we? Perhaps that is the starting point to begin raising the anchor to the green building that we so desperately need.

*Steve Andros is the principal of GrEn A/E Consultants, a green architectural specification and LEED consulting practice with projects in Arizona, Nevada and throughout the US. Steve's primary service to the design and construct team is advocacy and education about green building issues and methods through the use of "green specifications." Information about "GrEn-Spec" and other services available can be found at [www.grenspec.com](http://www.grenspec.com)*