

FROM THE TAILGATE

Sage advice from the trenches

By Ron Jones

Keeping Score

As I look at what is happening in the green building arena, I can't help asking the question, "When do we move past scorekeeping and start making a real commitment to the future?" For too long now, we have concerned ourselves with how many points we accumulate according to this template, or that rating system, or somebody's version of a program rather than focusing on the intended results and benefits that have us practicing green building in the first place.

We have spent a good deal of time determining which "label" to align ourselves with, which scoring system will give us the most bang for the buck, whose marketing strategy will result in maximum exposure and "differentiate" our homes the most from the competition. We measure the value of improvement by how much effort or expense is needed to take us to the next higher level of certification.

We have all endured the public relations platitudes, the easy-to-remember myths, and the "right thing to do" responses from builders and other industry specialists who talk the green talk, but don't walk the green walk in the evolution of their products and projects. And we have seen endless versions of "policy statements" from industry groups recommending actions by government and other decision-makers that declare their support for greater energy efficiency, resource management, waste reduction, and general quality of life ... as long as it doesn't cost anything additional, inconvenience anybody, come too close



to mandatory, or—God forbid—negatively impact our bottom line.

The housing industry has routinely hidden behind the skirts of "affordability" as the reason to delay raising the performance bar while avoiding the inclusion of operating expenses, long-term durability, and life cycle costs; the ever-ratcheting upward prices of energy, water, raw materials and other resources; impacts on human health; and most blatantly of all, the true environmental costs that result in the degradation of our planet's natural systems.

When do those columns get added to the spreadsheet?

As an industry, we invest countless dollars, hours, and the expertise of our lobbyists to combat a requirement that would cause us to install a \$200 exhaust fan in a starter home when we know that fan could help a homeowner potentially avoid thousands of dollars in mold damage

and certainly result in better indoor air quality in the home. This is affordability? How much does a trip to the emergency room for a child suffering an asthma attack affect the family's monthly budget?

When did builders decide to take cover behind institutions rather than taking ownership of the consequences—not just the convenient ones, but all of them—of the practice of building? When did we start to become what we despise the most and hide behind bureaucratic sleights of hand and shifting responsibilities?

Let's take an authentic stand. Let's exercise our intellect, our pride, and our conscience without regard to the loopholes that are made available to us. Let's not wait for a third party to hold us accountable. Let's practice green building because we know we should, because we know we need to, and because we want to ensure a healthy future for the planet and generations of people yet to come. GB