

Housing

DO IT YOURSELF— BUT DO IT GREEN

To those for whom home improvement is not a TV show but a way of life, there's a new commandment: Build green. The latest materials at building-supply stores are earth-friendly, such as nails made from recycled Buicks. Power-tool jacks can now lay flooring of wood salvaged from old barns or set tile composed mostly of crushed light bulbs or shattered windshields.

For many do-it-yourselfers, environmentalism isn't new. Energy efficiency became big during the oil crises of the 1970s. As indoor air quality became an issue during the past decade, less toxic products appeared on the market. But these two trends miss crucial points: They don't always conserve resources. And they don't save embodied energy—that is, the energy it takes to log trees or mine gypsum, process these materials into lumber or drywall, and finally, transport the products to your site.

TIN SHINGLES. Growth in ecological consciousness has led the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and other builder organizations to push the idea of sustainable architecture. This nascent trend emphasizes recycled products, construction methods that cut down on trash, and designs that call for less material.

The simplest way to start greening your home may be to use recycled products in your next project. Nails from

W.H. Maze come from melted-down cars. Rustic Shingles from Classic Products look like hand-split wood shakes but were once aluminum cans. Several companies make decking, landscape edging, and mailbox posts from recycled milk jugs. Others fashion plywood-like panels from cast-off

shield glass run about \$1 more than domestic tile. Glidden 2000 paint won't make a newly painted room smell like a chemical factory, but it does cost at least 5% more than your average latex.

HEALTH WOES. You're not likely to find everything at your local supplier. But stores dedicated to eco-building have opened, including Environmental Construction Outfitters in Manhattan (212 334-9659), Environmental Building Supplies in Portland, Ore. (503 222-3881), and Planetary Solutions in Denver (303 442-

406 549-7678) focuses on items that conserve raw materials. You may want to ask your architect to look at the AIA's *Environmental Resource Guide* (\$275 for nonmembers, \$195 for members, 800 365-2724). Updated quarterly, it offers a wealth of technical information aimed at professionals. For example, roof or floor joists made of engineered wood I-beams use half the wood of traditional 4-by-12 or 2-by-8 lumber but are as strong.

Model homes integrating these techniques are going up around the country. In Missoula, Mont., the Center for Resourceful Building Technology built the 2,200-sq. ft. ReCraft 90 house with one-sixth the lumber that would go into a typical house. Other showcase homes, often sponsored by local utilities, have been built in Seattle, Phoenix, and Upper Marlboro, Md.

But these houses don't solve all the problems. "Some building products that are good for the environment aren't good for people," says Victoria Schomer, editor of *Interior Concerns Resource Guide* (\$40, 415 389-8049). Engineered wood products, such as fiber board, are often glued together with formaldehyde-based glues that produce toxic gases. Carpet made from recycled plastic might make some people sick, as can some types of recycled insulation. You can

put up foil barriers over your insulation and use products to seal your carpet, but these are only half-measures. "What we're working for," says Boston-area architect Andrew St. John, "is something that won't harm the earth and won't harm us." Heather Miller



straw, rice hulls, peanut shells, and newsprint. A half dozen companies are remilling wood from old Nebraska barns and Southwest homesteads.

Sometimes, the cost is a little more. At \$4 a square foot, Traffic Tiles made of wind-

6228). For a mail-order catalog, call Shelter Supply (800 762-8399).

Also, several groups publish exhaustive listings of suppliers of everything from foundation cement to roof joists. *Guide to Resource Efficient Building Elements* (\$25,

cost is \$11 for one report; \$20 for two; \$27 for three.

TOT FUND. SteinRoe's Young Investor Fund (800 403-5437) aims to educate kids—and parents—about investing. The no-load fund, which owns such

companies as McDonald's and Walt Disney, issues a quarterly newsletter and annual report with special articles and games for kids. The minimum investment is \$2,500, or \$1,000 for a custodial account.

Worth Noting

■ **INSIDE INFO.** Consumers Union has improved its service that tells car buyers the exact dealer cost of any new model.

Now you can call a toll-free number, 800 933-5555, to get the information on the phone, faxed within four hours, or mailed. The report includes a comprehensive wholesale price breakdown for options. The