



The Green Architect

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Not Your Mother's Recycling

Specifying and purchasing products with recycled content are major steps towards reducing our impact on the environment. Today we have many choices. If we continue to ask and insist upon recycled and recyclable products, the choices will increase and the prices will decrease.

One of the seven prerequisites for US Green Building Council's LEED-NC (new construction) certification is that the architect or designer provide space for the collection of recyclables. Collecting paper alone isn't enough; they require at minimum the additional collection of glass, metal, and plastic. Within the optional LEED points (29 of the 69 total are required to meet minimum certification), recycling construction waste and incorporating products with recycled content can add up to four points.

Recycling can also be very profitable. According to Craig Sheehy CPM with Thomas Properties, the management company for the 950,000 s.f. Cal/ EPA building in Sacramento, the money saved by selling their building occupants' waste has offset their waste removal cost to zero. Before they started selling their highly valuable white paper waste they were

spending the traditional \$.06/s.f. or almost \$57,000 a year on waste removal.

In a similar way, many cities and private waste haulers provide and empty recycled waste bins at no cost. Because 30–40% of all office waste is paper, an owner can cut his waste hauling cost by a third with trash cans for recyclables and trash separating instructions for the cleaning crew.

You probably were not aware but you've been specifying and buying products with recycled content for many years. Suspended ceiling tiles and structural steel, for example, have always contained recycled content in their formulas.

Currently the industry recognizes two kinds of recycled content: postindustrial (PI) and post-consumer (PC). Post-industrial is the scrap metal or cotton trimmings left over from a large piece of metal or fabric after the die cut process. Post-consumer would be empty plastic water bottles or worn rubber tires. Both types of waste provide fodder for landfill. The PI waste, however, has many waste stream options and is rarely sent to landfill. Because of this, the USGBC recognizes products with PC–recycled content as more valuable in terms of sustainability.

A highly popular, high-content PI product is Bonded Logic's Ultra Touch Batt Insulation (www.bondedlogic.com). It consists of 82% PI–recycled blue jean and cotton underwear trimmings. It looks very much like traditional fiberglass insulation but is light blue. The product is fire-rated and provides the comparable R values for the same thickness as fiberglass. It's incredibly soft and does not require eye or skin protection to install.

Because the process to sterilize or reassimilate PC waste can be more toxic or may require more energy than the original manufacturing process, products with high PC content can be harder to find. A rare example of a 100% PC–recycled content product is Santana's Hiny Hiders (www.hinyhiders.com). Five of their 23 colors come in 100% PC–recycled content. Their remaining 16 colors are available in 70% PI content if specified at bid time.