

# Building Codes for a Small Planet

David Eisenberg, Director, Development Center for Appropriate Technology

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## Introduction

*When I began this column, I mentioned that from time to time I would have other people share their thoughts about various topics related to the shift to more sustainable building practices. For this installment, Kelly Jon Andereck, Environmental Coordinator for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, one of the world's most prestigious architecture, engineering, interiors and planning firms, writes about some significant changes taking place in the commercial and institutional building market.*

*Investors and responsible businesses are beginning to realize that higher returns are likely with businesses that are committed not just to their own sustainability, but to the sustainability of communities, the environment and longer-term economic stability. This growing awareness is showing up as building owners and users demand more sustainably designed and constructed buildings and those in the financial investment sector become more savvy about what the real risks and benefits are for higher performance, green buildings. We should expect this trend to continue for the foreseeable future as the true value of taking care of the things that matter is recognized as taking care of business.*

*~ David Eisenberg Director, Development Center for Appropriate Technology*

## The Times They Are A-Changin'.- The Evolving Environmental Marketplace

by Kelly Jon Andereck, Environmental Coordinator, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP

When it was released in 1964 many considered Bob Dylan's song, "*The Times They Are A Changin'*," an anthem for the protest movement. I Many of us can still hear and feel the dynamic social change of the time, and in writing on the subject of the evolving environmental marketplace as it applies to the building community, I could not help but think of Dylan's plea that we must all get involved because "the chance won't come again." Fortunately, as developers plan and strategize in this current marketplace, intent on focusing and capitalizing on high security, telecommunications and high-quality power, many continue to seek environmental solutions if there is a cost benefit.

At least partially as a result of the federal government's movement towards environmental management, procurement and stewardship for its buildings, the broader building community is seeing first-cost benefits, resulting in more private-sector clients seeking environmental performance goals such as higher efficiencies, reduced construction waste and properly designed interiors. For example, an increasing number of clients are asking for studies on the benefits of daylighting and encouraging design decisions that favor products produced within a 500-mile radius of a project, thereby increasing the environmental benefit of the product and bringing a potential marketing benefit to the project.

The benefits of environmentally sound design and construction often show up in operations and maintenance as well as reduced absenteeism and worker's compensation complaints and filings (which can translate into increased productivity and increased sales figures for retail businesses). Studies conducted for the California Energy Commission; the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers, Inc.; and the European Union all show quantifiable benefits to energy-efficient and environmental design. Prompted by the results of such studies, some of our clients have encouraged us to push far beyond sound sustainable or "green" design to the leading edge of benign environments and architectural design.

For more evidence that the times they are a changin' from a post-industrial to an eco-economy, consider the Dow Jones Sustainability Index: a new set of indicators of industry-wide best practices developed to analyze and quantify companies' overall strategies for and management of sustainability opportunities, risks and costs. The creation of the index, which evaluates factors including innovation, governance, employee retention, environmental performance and other stakeholder interests, clearly demonstrates that large financial institutions are beginning to recognize the link between sustainable business practices and long-term shareholder value.

Motivations for investing in sustainability vary, but two key elements stand out. The first is the concept of corporate responsibility, which is tied to the integration of economic, environmental and social factors into business strategies. This trends toward long-term shareholder value, increasing value to potential investors. According to the Sustainability Index, "because corporate sustainability performance can now be financially quantified, they now have an investable corporate sustainability concept."<sup>2</sup>

The second element that may interest an investor is the trend toward superior performance and better risk-to-return profiles than the typical investment. According to the Naturalist Network, the stock market performance of environmentally sensitive or "green" stocks outperformed others by 17 percent and, ". . . investor returns can be substantially improved by investing in companies with superior Eco-efficiency."<sup>3</sup> What this has meant to those in the business of developing, designing and constructing buildings is a significant and increasing demand for greener buildings and better environmental performance for the simple reason that they make good business sense.

As with all new and innovative design techniques, the real leadership in the field of sustainable building practices must come from those whose responsibility it is to carefully and impartially weigh their costs and benefits: designers, engineers and public officials. Our personal experiences and fields of professional expertise may vary, but the common threads of education, involvement and foresight should prompt us to point out to investors, other members of the building industry and consumers alike that, in Dylan's words,

*If your time to you  
Is worth savin'  
Then you better start swimmin'  
Or you'll sink like a stone  
For the times they are a-changin'.*

## Notes:

1. "The Times They Are A-Changin'." Bob Dylan. 1963, renewed 1991. Special Rider Music.
2. Dow Jones Sustainability Index. [www.sustainabilityindex.com/sustainability/investment.html](http://www.sustainabilityindex.com/sustainability/investment.html)
3. "Annual Stock Market Outperformance of 17% is Achieved by Environmental Leaders in the Global Pharmaceutical Sector." E-Wire. June 27, 2002. [www.ewire-news.com/wires](http://www.ewire-news.com/wires)

***Kelly Jon Andereck brings more than ten years' experience in technical architecture and design to Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP A specialist in sustainability, building performance, daylighting and the environmental marketplace, Andereck's design projects range from Imagineering's Euro-Disney to low-income housing in Southern California. He has also volunteered his work for projects such as the design of Playhouses for Friends, built to benefit The Easter Seal Society, and ongoing work for the U. S. Green Building Council, the State Of Illinois, Cook County and the City of Chicago. A graduate of California State Polytechnic University with a bachelor's degree in architecture, Andereck has also conducted postgraduate work at the University of California, Los Angeles, mastering in architectural technology.***

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