



Wisconsin BUILDER

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THE
GREEN
ISSUE

THE



WisDOT works
on green standards
for construction

ROAD TO

SUSTAINABILITY

The **A** List

Architectural firms
that stood out in 2008

DIGGING IN



Theresa Lehman
Miron Construction Co. Inc.



Theresa Lehman, director of sustainable services at Miron Construction Co. Inc., Neenah, talked with Wisconsin Builder about the growing popularity of sustainable construction and its development in the industry.

Wisconsin Builder: It's common for people to talk about sustainable construction and green building. Are they the same thing?

Lehman: They are used interchangeably. I don't know that they technically mean the same thing. Certainly, sustainability is sustaining, which is not the same as green, but when talking with the nonsuper-technical people of the world, the words are used interchangeably.

WB: What is the meaning of sustainability?

Lehman: Sustainability, in my mind, is taking a look at the bigger picture of how we as people impact the environment. To me it means: What opportunities are available to reduce our environmental footprint and do our part not to contribute to climate change? The goal is making sure, first and foremost, that the one planet we have and its finite resources are available for future generations. We all need to focus on minimizing waste and maximizing resources for that to happen.

WB: What has been the biggest change in sustainable construction?

Lehman: The biggest change has mostly been energy efficiency. When gas was over \$4 a gallon, we saw people making decisions because of price — combining trips, car-pooling, saving up a bunch of errands versus (going out) several times a day. It's just amazing. As energy prices fluctuate, so do people's focus or thoughts on energy. When I started with Miron as a consultant before joining as an employee in March 2008, Miron had four (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) projects. Right now, we have 26. The new U.S. Green Building Council requirements are phenomenal. They've literally transformed the industry in 10 years, and construction is very slow to change. It's awesome that in my career I've seen an entire transformation.

— Melissa Rigney Baxter



RETURNS REQUIRE INVESTMENTS

Sustainable construction often means more efficient buildings, but a return on investment still requires an investment.

“When you pick up a (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) scorecard and look at the minimum of 40 points, you could pick 40 points that would not increase the capital budget,” said Theresa Lehman, director of sustainable services at Miron Construction Co. Inc., Neenah. “But I caution my clients that in order to get a return, you must make an investment.”

“Do you want to pay for it now or pay for it later?”

Theresa Lehman, director of sustainable services, Miron Construction Co. Inc.

Higher-quality projects, a focus on maintenance cost and such specifics as higher-efficiency lighting all pay for themselves repeatedly during the life of a building, Lehman said.

“What I ask my clients is what they need for a return on investment, and then I help select within their budget,” she said.

If buildings earned a grade as students do, Lehman said, a building built merely to code would merit a passing grade, or D-. Adding levels of sustainability and efficiency can add cost initially but pay back big, she said.

“Do you want to pay for it now or pay for it later?”

Lehman said. “We take a look at the life cycle of the building, ask them how long they will own it and let them make their minds up.”