

Reflections on a Green Home Tour



By Michael Chandler | May 18, 2009

One thing our local Green Building Council really does right is the annual green home tour. We get great turnout from the public, and it gives the more experienced green builders a chance to open their homes to the novice green builders and share what's working and how we choose features that make sense for our region. Here are a few of the elements that make our tour such a success.

We have a really good tour guidebook with descriptions of the houses and an accurate map of the homes, so participants can plot out itineraries that makes sense for them. We get the guides out on the newsstands in local meeting places and on the Internet a couple of weeks before the tour. Builders link to their page in the online tour book and e-mail it out to friends, prospects, and past customers. Tour goers show up with the books or printouts from the website marked up with the houses they most want to see and questions they want to ask at each house.

We don't charge a fee for the tour. We charge our builders a reasonable fee to participate and sell ads in the tour guide. This way we make it possible for people to stop by only one or two houses as it works into their weekend plans. We also hand out *lots* of directional street signs and put out very large job-site signs listing the tour hours and the builder's name and contact info, so we bring in the neighbors and others who may not have heard about the tour from our ad campaign.

We work hard to have a good mix of building types. Some people are really offended by light-green or high-priced green-certified homes, some want to see "mainstream green", some want to see the state-of-the-art energy and water conservation features, some want to see a lot of recycled materials and creative reuse. We always work hard with Habitat for Humanity and the local affordable housing folks to make sure that they have the support they need to get their homes Energy Star approved and Green Certified and to make sure they can

show off their efforts on the tour. People have the impression that green homes are a lot more expensive and that they may look or even smell funny. The best way to counter this impression is to show them green in all sizes and prices.

We hold a press conference on the Monday before the tour. The builders come to pick up their tour guides and directional signs and to get a briefing on the details that we all need to know to make the tour work. On the first morning of the tour, we'll have a two-hour event in a central location with educational panels and booths for our tour-book advertisers and sponsors.

The green tour is such a strong motivator to be part of our HBA's green-building council that builders who enroll a house in our program but fail to follow through on certification within a set time from pulling a CO can be banned from participating in the tour.