

Florida's Uniqueness Allows FHBA Members to Reliably Go Green



Alys Beach was the first community in Northwest Florida certified as a "Florida Green" development by the Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC). (Photo by Alys Beach)

Good news for Florida builders, developers, governments trending towards green.

By Carole Hawkins

Back in the 1980s when consumers demanded green building, they expected an energy-efficient home. Today green means a lot more.

Consumers want energy and water efficiency, healthy indoor air, durable materials, sustainable construction, and yards with native plants. And, they want their green homes tied to eco-friendly neighborhoods, commercial buildings and cities.

It gets more complex. Sustainable building in Florida—where humidity, termites and hurricanes abound—is not the same as sustainable building in the arid Southwest or frigid Northeast.

So, how do Floridians go reliably green?

The answer lies at the heart of the Florida Green Building Coalition's (FGBC) mission. In 2000 FGBC brought together local stakeholders from the construction, government, academic and research communities to create green standards tailored specifically to Florida.

FGBC's five certifications provide pathways to build green homes, developments, local governments, high rises and commercial buildings. Today FGBC is by far the largest certifier of green homes, communities and local governments in Florida.

Florida green certified homes are fortified against hurricanes, sealed against moisture, ventilated to curb mold, and filtered for fresher air.

"There are a lot of things we've put in place that you won't find in the national standards," said FGBC executive director CJ Davila. "It's very stringent."

National standards like USGBC LEED, Green Globes and the National Green Standard also move contractors towards environmentally-friendly building. But, Florida Green are the only standards developed with climate-specific criteria. They address Florida's hot-humid environment, topography and natural disasters.

Florida Green stresses disaster mitigation, such as safe rooms, proper securing of outdoor items so that they won't become flying debris,

and close-cell insulation that ties the roofing structure together.

The standards also recommend an unvented attic or no attic, which reduces problems caused by air infiltration, and extra protection on roofs to guard against water infiltration.

While Florida Green adds guidelines for hurricane-force winds and floods, it leaves out the costly guidelines for cold-climate weatherization that national standards require.

Not all aspects of green building are more expensive, either. Some green materials cost less than non-green, said Ralph Locke, president of Environmental Construction & Consulting. Compare recycled ZIP System sheathing, at \$18 to \$23 per sheet, to plywood at \$25 to \$28.

Overall, Florida Green certification adds less than 5 percent to the cost of a home, Locke said. Homeowners will make up the extra cost over time with lower electric bills and insurance premiums.

FGBC's certification process, including low builder fees, is often more affordable than other



*Perrone Construction
Bird Key Custom Home - Sarasota*

certifications. The free market aspect of FGBC certifiers keep costs low.

The forms and manuals are free, and can be downloaded directly from FGBC's website. A small group of local third-party certifiers perform the inspections, and builders often work with the same people repeatedly. That makes it easy for builders to learn the requirements, Davila said.

That's good news for Florida builders who want to get in on the country's growing trend towards green.

More than half of U.S. builders expect to include green in over 60 percent of their projects by 2020, a survey by Dodge Data & Analytics said. Millennials have long been rumored to be behind the push towards green. But the largest demand for green has come from people 55 and older.

Though builders say the cost to go green has been rising, so has the amount customers are willing to pay for it. In 2015, 45 percent of builders said their customers were willing to pay a premium of 5 percent or more for a green home. In 2011, only a third of builders said customers were willing to pay that much.

While consumers are driving green's growth, many builders believe it's also right thing to do. Green is more than an environmental standard, said FGBC president Jeremy Nelson. It says you've built a quality home.

"If you just build to code, you're building the worst building allowed by law," Nelson said. "Green building ends up being a more durable product. It's what you want to be putting your name on." ➤

