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By Kate Nolan
Green Right Now

PHOENIX — When the [Greenbuild Expo 2009](#) landed in Phoenix Nov. 9 with 30,000 participants, the circus came to town for Mick Dalrymple. He runs the [a.k.a. Green Eco-Friendly Building Center](#), the Phoenix area's first store of its kind.

Dalrymple also sits on the national board of the U.S. Green Building Council, the organizer of Greenbuild Expo and International Conference, which this year (its eighth) has packed 1,800 exhibitors into the recently expanded Phoenix Convention Center.

An electrical engineer, former Hollywood filmmaker and graduate of the Thunderbird School of Global Management, Dalrymple first came to green building as a way out of an oil-based U.S. national security policy. He would give talks on how green building could lead to energy independence, and when people complained they couldn't find where to buy these mysterious carbon-neutral products, he opened a store.

Dalrymple has enthusiasm and some concern for the abundant new green technologies and materials on hand.

Just as former Vice President Al Gore cautioned the green builders at an opening celebration Wednesday night, Dalrymple warned against "greenwashing" – selling something as green that isn't.

"The business has become more mainstream and a lot of the traditional channels are starting to be populated with 'light' green materials. They may be better, but nowhere near what is possible, or they may use toxins or child labor to produce it," Dalrymple said, noting that the maze of certifications in the industry sometimes can lead to more, rather than less confusion. He also mentions the small percentage of recycled materials in some so-called recycled products: "Why not recycle more? I want to see more things recycled—pecan shells or pistachio shells—stuff people normally think of as waste. Why is it waste?"

Dalrymple also has some idea of where the wild things are at the jam-packed Greenbuild Expo 2009.

LED residential lighting

"I've been waiting five years for the next step in LED. I think this will be the year of the LED. I have a background in film and I just love lights," Dalrymple said.

He may be right. LEDs (light-emitting diodes), traditionally the light on your clock radio—use less energy, live eons longer, doesn't emit heat, work with a dimmer switch and don't contain the mercury of compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). Until now, LED fixtures have been too expensive and didn't look "warm" enough for household use. New technology has improved the products and brought the price down. The life of an LED can be 50,000 hours (or more than 5 years if you left it on around the clock).

[Cree LED Lighting](#), a growing green company based in North Carolina, is working to improve the quality and price of LEDs. Cree offers "Cree True White Technology," to deliver warm color and very high efficiency. Its LR6 LED uses 12 watts to deliver the equivalent of a 65watt incandescent. LR6 and other fixtures can be retrofitted into existing recessed lighting hook-ups, last about 12 years in homes and cost under \$100.

[RAB Lighting's](#) outdoor LPack, made for over garage doors and pathway lighting, uses about 13 Watts to light the equivalent of a 55 watt incandescent for 50,000 hours; at \$140, it comes in a cool aluminum housing that looks sort of like an over-sized Blackberry.

Composite Flooring.

"Shredded bamboo is now made into flooring that has patterns and looks fabulous. And the popularity of cork flooring is growing, almost replacing bamboo," Dalrymple said.

A fast-growing grass, bamboo is a renewable resource, but for optimal environmental imprint, it shouldn't be harvested before 5.5 years and should come from the hardy moso species. Ask questions when shopping. Some manufacturers use formaldehyde for bonding—but they don't have to.

[Teragren Flooring](#) doesn't use formaldehyde and offers an array of Floorscore-certified (a third-party certification by Scientific Certification Systems) bamboo flooring; this year Teregren sells water and bacteria-resistant countertops, in addition to flooring.

Cork flooring isn't exactly new – Frank Lloyd Wright used it in his 1936 masterpiece Fallingwater with good reason. It's a natural insulator, is silent and reduces jostling of the joints and spine when you walk on it. The best cork comes from the Mediterranean. A softer version grows in China, but the durable stuff is firm and a by-product of the wine-cork industry in Portugal and Italy.

Both [Expanko](#) and [Sustainable Flooring](#) show gorgeous samples of Mediterranean cork tile and mosaic cork tile. Expanko provided the new floors when Fallingwater was restored.

With flooring, comes the danger that what adheres it may be manufactured with formaldehyde and other toxins. A new product from [Smith & Fong Plyboo](#), SoyBond, is formaldehyde-free, made from soybeans for use with bamboo. Plyboo also makes a line of nontoxic plywood.

Certification and label help.

With the mainstreaming of green building, new green labels abound at Greenbuild Expo — and at every home improvement store. But which ones mean anything? Dalrymple says keep in mind that a third-party rating, like [Green Seal](#) for paints, cleaners and other products, is likely to be more dependable than the “green this or green that” labels created in the marketing departments of home improvement companies. A growing legion of online help is available to sift out the scientific from the marketing messages.

[Ecolabelling](#) is a tool for anyone. It’s a nonprofit that tries to compile data on every green label in the world and tells you what the label is worth.

The so-called “Amazon.com of green building products,” [Buildingease](#) helps designers, contractors and others search for certified green products. Click on “3” to find legitimate third-party green product ratings. It’s a one-stop portal for researching, rating and buying green building products at the lowest price.

The newest entry in online aid is [GreenKonnnect](#), a search engine built for the green building industry. The Beta version bowed at Greenbuild Expo. Watch for the actual launch. Utilizing a database of LEED-certified building projects and green products used in LEED buildings, site organizers hope to become a first stop for architects, engineers and contractors planning projects for LEED certification or other types. It will be free to everyone at first. Later, manufacturers will pay, based on product sales.

Thousand of products and so little time. A solid two day’s of looking is on display at Greenbuild Expo. For detailed listings, visit the [Greenbuild website](#).

Then, if you plan to transition into a green home, start small, says Dalrymple. “Buy a few low energy bulbs. See how you like it. Pretty soon you’ll be opening a green products store and wondering: why did I do that?”

(Kate Nolan writes about the environment and health in Phoenix. She worked formerly as areporter for The Arizona Republic; managing editor at Phoenix New Times and editor at Playboy.)