

Make Your Bathroom Eco-Friendlier

Save energy, upgrade fixtures and more for a greener restroom
By [John Loecke](#) Posted November 30, 2010 from [Remodeling & Makeovers](#)

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Going in and out of the bathroom, you probably never think about the fact that this unassuming room is one of the biggest energy-users in your house. But with a few changes you can make it a healthier space for you and your family—and stop throwing money down the drain.

Save Water

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), bathroom showers, toilets and sinks account for nearly 75 percent of a home's water usage. Robin Wilson, a nationally recognized eco-friendly and healthy-home interior designer, offers these options to use less water:

Replace an older toilet, which may use up to 6 gallons of water per flush, with a 1.28-gallon-per-flush design. It could save you up to 16,500 gallons of water per year.

Swap out a 2.75-gallon-per-minute (GPM) showerhead for a 1.75 GPM design. This can save more than 7,700 gallons of water per year.

Look for the blue and green WaterSense water droplet logo on toilets as well as showerhead and faucet packages, which means they're EPA-certified for saving water.

Retrofit an existing toilet with a dual-flush converter or add a low-flow aerator to an existing faucet (this device installs directly inside the spout) to cut a typical 2.5 GPM flow faucet to 1.5 GPM.

Good Wood

Another area to green up: your bathroom vanity. The source of the wood and how it's constructed—made of plywood, particleboard or medium-density fiberboard (MDF)—all affect its eco-friendliness. Consider this:

Choose a vanity made of from engineered wood, which is greener than one made from a harvested hardwood like oak, ash or maple. Engineered wood is constructed of scraps from a variety of hardwoods, and now healthier soy-based adhesives are being used to hold the scraps together instead of glues containing carcinogenic urea formaldehyde.

Look for the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) label when shopping for a new vanity. That's how you know the wood came from forestry operations that meet strong environmental, social and economic standards, Wilson says.

Research products or manufacturers with FSC certification at fsc.org and visit columbiaforestproducts.com to find those that use formaldehyde-free hardwood.

Walls & Floors

Replace wall and floor tile only when you need to, and upgrade to a greener version than what you have. Look for:

Salvaged products: Your local building supply salvage store or one of Habitat for Humanity's ReStore resale outlets could have what you're looking for, says Wilson. Nothing's more eco than rescuing from the landfill.

Recycled materials: Seek companies with products made from recycled goods, like [Crossville](#), a Tennessee-based manufacturer that recently introduced EcoCycle, a stone-look product that's made from 40 percent recycled ceramic content; or [IceStone](#), a New York-based manufacturer that produces a solid-surface material for countertops and walls made from 100 percent recycled glass.

Local manufacturers: Buy from a store that carries products made within 500 miles of where you live. You'll save on natural resources required to transport the material to your job site, reducing your carbon footprint.

Paint



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Choose low- or zero-VOC paint for untiled walls and ceilings, which are free of harmful odor-causing chemicals. You can find this paint both from boutique brands like [Mythic Paint](#) and major manufacturers like [Benjamin Moore](#), whose Aura Bath and Spa line is specially formulated to lock out moisture and maintain color integrity. **Why**

Must-Haves

Low-Flow Fixtures: Look for a showerhead that sprays at 1.5 GPM instead of the typical 2.5 GPM—it uses 40 percent less water. *FloWise showerhead, from \$25, American Standard; [AmericanStandard.com](#)*



Recycled Materials: Choose pieces made from salvaged materials, like this stainless steel sink made from 80 percent recycled metal. *Neo-Metro Oval Console Sink, from \$1,900, Neo-Metro; [Neo-Metro.com](#)*



Flush Converter: This drop-in device converts a single-flush toilet into a dual-flush, saving a family of four up to 15,000 gallons of water per year. *Dual Flush Converter, \$25, HydroRight; [Gomiji.com](#) for stores.*



Water-Wise Toilet: This one-piece wonder flushes using only 1.28 gallons of water rather than the typical 1.6. *Archer toilet, \$510, Kohler; [Kohler.com](#)*



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