

Basics of greenwashing

In Australia, it was recently reported that tonnes of plywood from a mill in Malaysia associated with serious breaches of sustainable logging practices in the past two years are being used in one of Sydney's "greenest" new developments, No 1 Central Park on Broadway.

It was also reported that the wood was not certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council or the Program for the Enforcement of Forest Certification, organisations which verify whether a logging operation can be regarded as sustainable.

Its developer Fraser Property said the company understood that the timber used complied with the Green Building Council of Australia's requirements for 5 Green Star certification but if that proves otherwise, it would instruct the construction company Watpac to address the issue.

Asked to comment, Bovis Lend Lease project manager Thirukumaran Jallendran, who is also a board member of Malaysia Green Building Confederation (MGBC), said the scenario in Sydney can be seen as a "chain of custody certification issue" which involves tracking the originality of the wood products from the forest to the consumer.

He said a parallel can be drawn in Malaysia where some developers or projects are more interested in the point-chasing exercise with regards to a certain Green Building rating rather than the intent behind going green.

He added that they ignore the basic requirements of a green building and focus solely on the "tangible" pursuits that assure them attractive return of investments.

Asked if the Sydney project is greenwashing, he opined that the developer was not doing it intentionally and the occurrence was probably due to an oversight or lack of follow-up on the construction.

According to him, there are many greenwashing occurrences ranging from corporations which are big sponsors of environmental non-governmental organisations which operate unsustainably to those which claimed high recycled content in their products.

There are also those which tend to deceive the public by portraying to be "eco-friendly" but their products may contain genetically modified produce or may come with huge environmental footprints.

He believes that coal, for example, can be never be a green product nor clean since the process involves mining and extraction of resources from deep

within the ground and then burning it to release carbon dioxide.

"New technologies and processes can take place to reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants but to call it green or clean will be stretching it."

Locally, he said the development and use of green building rating tools such as the Green Building Index (GBI) and publication of the *Green Pages Malaysia* directory by MGBC are steps in the evolution of the green building concept and provide a common language for establishing what's green and greenwash.

Meanwhile, developers such as Sunway City Bhd said they should not mislead the public by claiming their developments are certified green when these are not, adding it is their duty to obtain the certifications by adhering to the stringent rules and procedures required by the authorities.

Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Mohamed Razeek Hussain said, "It is unethical for developers to be involved in greenwashing as that will affect their reputation and integrity. We believe green initiatives are the way forward to address environmental issues and benefit all stakeholders."

Boon Chee Wee, Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia president, who also chairs the GBI, said, "A common suspicion of green washing is when corporations emphasise what they would need to comply by law as their key sustainability initiatives. GBI, as with most green building ratings, is voluntary by nature and owners of certified green buildings are not inhibited in promoting their achievements."

Boon added that another example of usual green washing is when corporations over-focus on one complementary aspect of their green efforts to overshadow and hopefully distract attention from other reasonable sustainable strategies that they could have.

Since GBI and generally all green building ratings are holistic in nature, it would mean that it is near impossible for any buildings to be rated satisfactorily by compliance with only one aspect of green building, he said.

According to him, to avoid green washing, there have been discussions on prerequisites for the applicants to apply for green building rating to demonstrate their commitments in their corporate practices.

However, such prerequisites will only take place in GBI when the local industry is more familiar and ready. For now, in the GBI industrial ratings for both new constructions and existing buildings, assessment has actually extended to include production processes.

- Geraldine Lim

What developers do for green concepts

Key initiatives are in the areas of design, innovation, sustainability and technologies for better efficiency in use of energy and water

By Geraldine Lim

It was just a month ago that I attended the Green Building Forum jointly organised by Malaysia Green Building Confederation and Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia.

One of the things which struck me was the figures presented by Bovis Lend Lease project manager Thirukumaran Jallendran - that buildings are responsible for 40 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, 40 per cent for solid waste generation and that buildings use one-third of the resources. These are startling figures.

On the bright side, a growing number of developers in the country are doing their best to build in greener ways.

Among them, Sunway City Bhd (SunCity) continues to solidify its position as a green developer committed to incorporating ecologically friendly designs and innovations into its developments.

"Our focus is on building homes and developments with technologies that can provide energy and water savings, which result in developments that are in harmony with nature," said Ho Hon Sang, managing director, property development, Malaysia.

"We believe that will translate to environmentally friendly developments where families can truly enjoy a sustainable and well-balanced lifestyle."

He added that the value of going green is reflected in the group's commitment to incorporating the Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS) philosophy into its projects.

"We are fully aware that homebuyers are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their choice of properties including key criteria such as comprehensive security features, a contemporary and eco-friendly design as well as lush green surroundings.



Natural lighting and lush greenery at KL Sentral Park, one of MRCB's green developments.



At Sunway Challis Damansara, rainwater from the roof is channelled and stored in tanks to be used for landscape irrigation.

"As such, we will continue to infuse the LOHAS philosophy in our future projects to enrich the lives of our customers."

Its Sunway Challis Damansara comprising garden townhouses in Selangor, conceptualised as a green development at its inception in 2005, is the first landed residential development in Malaysia to receive the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) of Singapore's Green Mark Certified Award, in 2009.

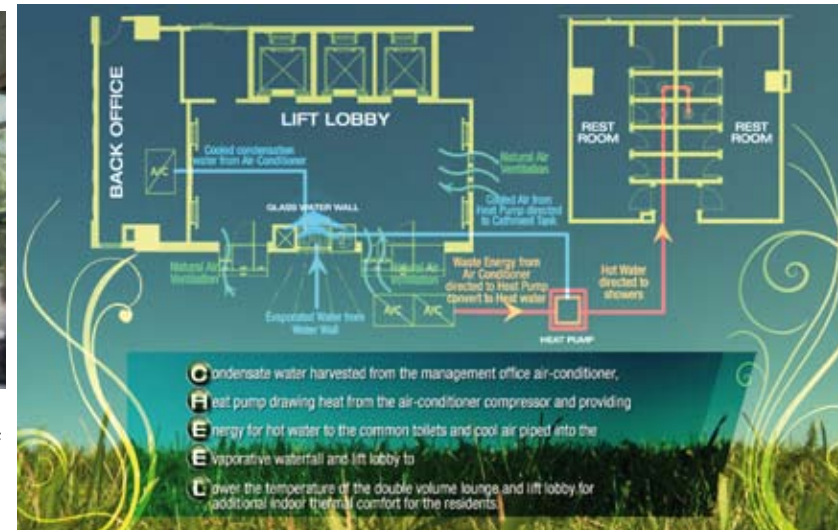
The development emphasised at the outset having largely passive green features in the design and adopting self-cooling strategies such as cross-ventilation and elements including ventilated roof space, insulated roof, cavity-wall on the western façade and generous overhangs.

Additionally, the windows are large to allow in maximum natural daylight and balconies are deep for sun-shading.

Meanwhile, Ken Holdings Bhd executive director Sam Tan said the primary reason for it going green is for the comfort and wellbeing of the owners of its developments such as Ken Bangsar in Kuala Lumpur and Ken Rimba in Shah Alam, Selangor.

"We strive to improve our homes' engineering to create tangible benefits for the owners in terms of savings on electricity, water and maintenance bills in addition to having great comfort in their homes," said Tan.

Some of the green features in multi-award winning Ken Bangsar include sound-proof laminated Low-E glass panels in each unit



The CHEEL system, designed by Tan Ken Bangsar, is installed at Ken Bangsar.

to cut off heat and sound, offer exceptional safety and 100 per cent UV protection; Bio-Fine low volatile organic compounds paint; "wind tunnel" to funnel breeze via a corridor to cool the lobby; and sun-shading.

Its Ken Rimba is the country's first green township to receive the BCA Green Mark Gold (provisional) award for the Ken Rimba Legian component, which is also Green Building Index certified, and the BCA Green Mark certified (provisional) for the commercial centre.

The Legian features homes with two water harvesting tanks, one located at the front and the other at the back.

Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd (MRCB), one of the green developers of commercial properties in the country, believes that walking the sustainability path will sustain its integrity as a responsible developer and maintain its corporate reputation as a strong and long term promoter of green buildings.

Importance of disclosure

Requests for corporate disclosure on sustainability issues in Asia are on the rise but many companies find that they have not been collecting necessary data across their business operations, and this is also a challenge in the property development sector, according to Helen Roeth, director of research at csr-asia.com, provider of information, training and research on sustainable business practices in the region.

She said measuring a set of key performance indicators has become increasingly important for the region's property developers, adding that effective systems are needed to measure and track environmental performance.

However, Roeth said few developers seem to actually effectively measure their environmental performance, pointing to findings by Asian Sustainability Rating, a regional benchmarking tool developed by Responsible Research and CSR Asia.

Of the 42 property companies analysed for benchmarking purpose, only 31 per cent publish a quality sustainability report.

Citing Hong Kong, she said companies seeking to list on the Hang Seng Sustainability Index need to show the ways they manage the environmental impact of their business operations.

And according to a *CSR-Asia* weekly newsletter in 2010, companies in Asean produce sustainability reports to "gain competitive edge when attracting and retaining capital, dealing with global clients and managing relationships with governments".

In Malaysia, developer Ken Holdings Bhd, one of the carbon neutral companies, publishes a sustainability report to inform its shareholders, buyers and the public of its green efforts, said executive director Sam Tan.

He said such a practice is not mandatory in the country but is encouraged.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Resources Corp Bhd, in its *Sustainability Report 2009*, highlighted its contributions to sustainable developments and the effects of the company's actions had on its customers, shareholders, employees, business partners, society and the environment.

The *CSR-Asia* weekly newsletter in 2010 reported that Malaysia has the highest number of reporters with 49 companies involved in a variety of diversified interests producing 97 sustainability reports in the past eight years.

Those with interests in the property arena include YTL Corp Bhd and UEM Environment Sdn Bhd, a member of UEM Group. - Geraldine Lim

Use tool as guide

There are no certified green townships in the country as yet because the Green Building Index (GBI) Township Tool was launched only months ago. However, there are now seven pilot projects registered and in the process of submitting for certification.

This is according to Dr Tan Loke Mun, chairman of the PAM (Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia) Sustainability Committee responsible for the development of the GBI, and a protem member of the Malaysian Green Building Confederation.

Among the pilot projects are Elmina East being developed by Sime Darby Property Bhd and Ken Rimba by Ken Holdings Bhd. Both developments are located in Shah Alam, Selangor.

Tan said developers are very keen to include sustainability and green criteria in their master-planned projects and with the GBI Township Tool readily available, they can now use the criteria as a guide or recipe to plan greener townships.

"Developers can download it for free from the website," he added.

One of the positive outcomes of using the tool, Tan said, is that land can be more efficiently utilised for the betterment of the environment and the people who live in the communities.

However, he noted the biggest challenge currently is public transportation and linkages to city centres and to other communities.

On whether developers of townships should be compelled to follow the tool in the future, he said, "Eventually, laws and rules will come into play ... but it is common sense to do the right thing, that is to create better communities and to save the environment."

The GBI Township Tool was designed to assist architects, planners, designers, builders, property owners, government bodies, developers and end-users to understand the impact of each design choice and to create environmentally friendly solutions.

- Pavithar Sidhu

Six core categories under the GBI Township Tool

The Green Building Index (GBI) Township Tool is a comprehensive environmental rating system designed by Pertubuhan Akitek Malaysia (PAM) and Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia for sustainable townships. These tools are adopted to minimise the impact of the environment by adopting the best practices in terms of energy and water efficiency for a sustainable development.

Developers should comply with these six core categories that were developed to address townships as places that are well planned, designed, safe and secure and to enhance the surrounding environment, thus providing residents with high quality life.

CLIMATE, ENERGY AND WATER

(To balance the ongoing production and consumption of energy and water)

- Heat island design principles
- Efficient street and park lighting
- On-site energy generation
- Renewable energy
- Reduced water use
- Reduction in water use by wastewater treatment

ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGY

(To respect the surrounding environment and native ecological systems)

- Biodiversity conservation
- Land reuse
- Ecology
- Flood management and avoidance
- Wetland and water body conservation
- Agricultural lands preserve
- Hill slope development
- Sustainable storm water design and management
- Proximity to existing infrastructure
- Services infrastructure provision
- Light pollution

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DESIGN

(Designed and planned for the benefit of the community)

- Green spaces
- Compact development
- Amenities for communities
- Provision for universal accessibility
- Secure design
- Health in design
- Recycling facilities
- Community diversity
- Affordable housing
- Community thrust
- Governance

TRANSPORTATION AND CONNECTIVITY

(To provide well connected places that have a broad range of transportation options)

- Green transport master plan
- Availability and frequency of public transport
- Facilities for public transportation
- Pedestrian networks
- Cycling networks
- Alternative transport options

BUILDING AND RESOURCES

(To have a lower impact on building resources by applying the far from less principle)

- Low impact material (infrastructure)
- Low impact material (building or structures)
- Regional material
- Quality in construction
- Construction waste management
- Site sedimentation and pollution control
- Sustainable construction practice
- GBI certified building

BUSINESS AND INNOVATION

(To tailor the response to local needs in creating business and employment while incorporating innovative solutions)

- Business
- Innovation
- GBI innovation

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