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## Europe's biggest in-plant home builder discusses: **Profiting from The Greening of the Built Environment**



Gerry McCaughey, CEO of Infineco, stands by a model of the company's Lighthouse, which recently debuted to accolades in Europe. The home achieves a net-zero energy rating.

EL SEGUNDO, CA—The built environment in the United States currently accounts for 40% of all carbon dioxide emissions, a greenhouse gas that has contributed to climate change. Yet the construction industry has escaped scrutiny.

Gerard McCaughey, CEO of Infineco, a green-building consulting firm here, warns that the industry needs to be prepared to abandon its 'business as usual' position given the Obama administration's environmental agenda. But he also adds that the first companies to successfully offer green products and services will be in the best position to reap profits from the transition to sustainable building.

"The industry's ability to avoid regulatory reform to date is an indication of the power that they collectively have," said McCaughey, who has been at the forefront of the green building movement in Europe for the last two decades. He adds, "The construction industry is one of the largest sectors of the economy with significant political influence. Yet it continues to ignore its responsibilities to the planet."

McCaughey pointed out that many proven technologies exist today that are direct substitutes for current products and processes and if their use was encouraged by the adoption of standards and regulations they would significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions without any economic hardship. One example is Portland Cement, one of the largest emitters of CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases, which can be directly substituted with Ground Granulated Blast Furnace Slag (GGBS) cement.

"Any change, even those that provide substantial benefits, will have resistance by those who have vested interests in the old methods of operation," remarked McCaughey.

He cited the U.S. automotive industry and its resistance to increased fuel efficiency standards in the United States. As manufacturers continued to produce cars with large engines, low gas mileage and high CO<sub>2</sub> outputs arguments were made that bigger cars were safer for U.S. drivers who generally drove longer distances. Yet at the same time the same manufacturers were offering European consumers, who for decades had become accustomed to more fuel-efficient vehicles, the same sized cars but with smaller engines than their U.S. counterparts.

"It was only after the beleaguered automakers in Detroit were deemed too large to fail and bailed out by the government that they began talking 'green,'" he added.

While specific legislation for energy efficiency in the built environment has not yet been mandated at the federal level, state and local governments have begun to formulate policy with target benchmarks. The State of California has passed legislation that all new homes be carbon neutral – able to produce as much energy as they consume on an annual basis – by 2020 and all new commercial buildings by 2030.

McCaughey believes that construction executives who recognize the immediate need to take steps towards sustainability can position their companies with long-term first-mover advantages with minimal risk. Europe is about 10 years ahead of the United States in the adoption of energy efficiency for both residential and commercial structures. McCaughey contends however that the green building pioneers on that continent have provided a roadmap of the courses of action that will and will not work, and those that have and have not been profitable.

According to McCaughey, incorporating technological advances currently in place in Europe to increase the thermal performance of new homes and applying some of these technologies to existing homes would provide enormous gains on a multitude of fronts. In turn the work provides jobs and increases demand for building materials. Home owners who spend less on heating and cooling of their homes will have more disposable income. And the installed technologies while good for the planet will also reduce energy demand and in turn dependence on foreign governments for oil.

"Building green makes good business sense that is also good for the Earth," said McCaughey. "With proven technologies already available there is no reason for businesses involved with the built environment to not begin the inevitable transition to a genuinely sustainable future and profit from it."

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