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uring the last few edi-

tions of Concrete in

Focus, we have written

about the numerous

advantages of concrete

from a sustainable

development stand-

point. Concrete truly is a green building

material. What can be more sustainable than
to build the Pantheon in Rome around 200
A.D. and never have to replace it? That
aspect of sustainable construction doesn't
carry the flash to get most people's attention.

But more and more sustainable building
advocates are beginning to recognize con-
crete's inherent "green" advantages.

One of the most often overlooked attrib-
utes of concrete being used to improve our
environment is decorative concrete. Decora-
tive concrete continues to experience dou-
ble-digit growth year after year. The onset of
computer controlled integral color systems
has accelerated acceptance in the specifica-
tion community for greater usage of color in
both interior and exterior applications. Many also are realizing the significant cost
advantage provided by integrally colored
floors over competing materials. On a first
cost basis, colored concrete floors generally
are cheaper than the in-place cost of tile,
v Vinyl, carpet, stone or wood flooring.

Though less costly, designers using concrete
still can evoke any style, color scheme or sur-
face characteristic they can imagine, provid-
ing infinite variety. We could talk about
design options throughout the entire article,
but our real purpose is to express that you
not only can design creatively and save
money with concrete, but most importantly,
have a positive impact on the environment.

Carpet and vinyl tile are two of the
leading floor covering choices used in the
United States. In most cases, they are made
from petrochemical-based compounds and
concrete floors reduce or can completely eliminate this issue from floor coverings. Since floor coverings are such a large percentage of the surface area in a building, this is no small matter.

We have focused on the air quality issues — what about dust, dust mites and other indoor particulate matter that exists later in the structure? With carpet, these types of matter can accumulate in the carpet itself and exist until the carpet is replaced. I heard a speaker once say, weigh your carpet at installation and weigh it again when you remove it for replacement and you will see how much matter is in the carpet. Speaking of replacing carpet, how long does carpet last? I guess that is a quality and wear-dependent issue. I would note it is fair to say it is more often measured in years, not decades. Concrete has lasted millennia in a number of applications. That means a concrete floor eliminates how much carpet or tile that has to be placed in landfills? Think about how much carpet you would have to replace to last 1000 years and how big a landfill it would take to hold it. I think it is a pretty solemn image. That is truly thinking in a sustainable manner.

Another area to discuss is carpet that has to be replaced due to mildew. Whether it is in a basement in the Midwest or the mountain of carpet being disposed of due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita, carpet doesn’t like to get wet for long. It would make sense that in basements or low-lying areas, let’s say areas where flood insurance is required, that decorative concrete floors would provide an alternative that would make it easier and faster for homeowners to return to their homes. It could also have a positive effect on insurance rates if it was enacted on a wholesale basis.

The beauty of colored concrete continues to be mistaken for much more expensive building materials by many who do not realize what they are actually looking at. Colors; textures like stone, brick, pavers and the like; as well as finely polished diamond-ground finishes all produce outstanding aesthetic value at bargain-basement prices. Maybe that’s why businesses like Wal-Mart, Chili’s, Kroger and a large number of national chains continue to specify more colored concrete every year.

For more information on NRMCA’s promotion program, contact Pool at 281/702-4557 or via email at vpool@nrmca.org.