

editor's note



I USED TO THINK THAT JUGGLING WAS ONE OF THOSE NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE SKILLS THAT ONLY A FEW INCREDIBLY COORDINATED PEOPLE COULD ACCOMPLISH.

Like everyone else, I had picked up three balls countless times, hurled them in the air, and watched them fall to the ground.

However, during my family vacation this summer to the Delawana Inn on the shores of Lake Huron, I attended a brief juggling clinic (I had wanted to see the instructor the night before, but that's a different story involving late-night shenanigans and misbehaving children). But after a simple 10-minute lesson (and plenty of sleep since I didn't stay up late for the juggling show—yes, I'm bitter), I could keep three balls in the air, at least for a few moments. I'll never be an accomplished juggler (okay, now *that* takes some serious skill), but basic juggling ended up being pretty easy.

It turns out that being "green" is a bit like juggling: The basics are easy; mastering the subtleties requires skill and practice.

On the most basic level, steel is inherently green. Today's wide-flange members come from 95% recycled material, and steel is completely recyclable. The mills have cut their energy usage by more than a third and reduced their carbon emissions enough to even exceed the Kyoto protocol. (If you want to know more about steel's green qualities, visit www.aisc.org/sustainability or the Steel Recycling Institute at www.recycle-steel.org.)

But a recent press release I received from the good folks at Side Plate Systems reminded me that there's a lot more to being green. The release talked about the need to design buildings that not only reduce material quantities, but also reduce the manpower needed to erect the structure. It explained that while steel is the greenest structural material, there's an ecological balance between reducing material and increasing manpower. That there's an even greater impact on the environment by the workers erecting a building than there is by the building material

itself. And that the worst environmental impact is from the workers on-site (while shop workers, who usually live closer to the workplace, have a lesser impact). In other words, the press release reminded me of many of the advantages of structural steel construction—advantages that go far beyond just the amazingly high recycled content of structural steel.

Of course, being green can go even further. My friend Sylvie Boulanger (or Dr. Sylvie, as her fans know her) from the Canadian Institute of Steel Construction told me that some fabricators have taken being green to heart to such an extent that they've built a cogeneration plant to provide cleaner energy and minimize environmental impact.

And while it's not uncommon for companies to have light sensors that turn on lights only when a room is occupied, some companies are looking at skylights to reduce the need for artificial lighting. Others are instituting water management programs. And the best part? These techniques are not only good for the environment, but also for a company's pocketbook.

So don't just be content with knowing that being part of the steel design and construction industry by definition makes you a green consumer. Go beyond the obvious and look at your processes and designs. Think beyond just getting your LEED points and consider what will truly make a difference. Even if you only switch from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent bulbs, it will make a difference.

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