



**Build Green, Make Green**  
*New York Times, Editorial on Building Energy Use*

**August 11, 2006 - (NYT) – Opinion** — Recent record-breaking heat waves had governments from Sacramento to Washington, D.C., urging businesses and homeowners to turn down the lights and ratchet up the thermostat. The message was especially urgent last week in New York City, where City Hall and businesses teamed up to reduce the strain on the electric grid. Their concerted effort probably helped avert a blackout.

That particular heat wave is gone; the lights are back up and the thermostats down. But it would be a tragedy if that meant an end to the conversation about cutting down on unnecessary energy consumption.

Buildings are something of an energy-efficiency blind spot in this country. Public attention tends to focus largely on automobile companies and mileage, but houses and skyscrapers consume more energy than cars. According to the Energy Department, residential and commercial buildings account for 40 percent of total energy consumption in this country, versus just 28 percent for the entire transportation sector.

Companies are seeing the light on what are known as green buildings and the lower operating costs that come with them. For instance, The Washington Post noted last week that PNC Financial Services Group's new green bank branches are using 45 percent less energy than comparable structures. And the company says that it builds them faster and cheaper than through old-fashioned construction methods. The new Bank of America Tower rising in Midtown Manhattan will feature special insulating glass windows and a plant-covered roof for natural temperature control. For maximum efficiency, an on-site natural-gas power generator will also recapture energy from lost heat headed out the building's chimney, lowering energy costs by an estimated 40 percent or more.

There are ways for government to make the payoff even greater. California is the model when it comes to offering incentives to utility customers for increased energy efficiency. But even in states that fail to offer rebates and tax benefits, businesses have strong motives of their own to

get on board simply for the sake of competitiveness.

Corporate membership of the U.S. Green Building Council, which manages the leading certification program, has increased more than tenfold since 2000. Wal-Mart, famed for its ability to slash costs, is trying to reduce the energy used in stores by 30 percent while also increasing the efficiency of its vehicle fleet and cutting back solid waste.

Companies can choose to be energy-wasting dinosaurs, but in an age of escalating prices, they'll go extinct. In business, the company with the lowest costs usually wins.