

**FCW GUEST COLUMNIST**

**GREENSTEP**

**Leadership: Process**

**Interface**

**The greening of Red China**

Interface for its Re-Entry 2.0 program that recycles post-consumer nylon carpet and carpet backing.



**Jim Gould**  
PRESIDENT,  
FLOOR COVERING INSTITUTE

Author Tom Friedman recently stirred the pot when he wrote that China has decided to go green; otherwise, it will "die from its own development." Friedman said China's decision launches the environmental equivalent of the space race and

it is determined to win. If this is true, the U.S. flooring industry needs to examine the implications and opportunities.

First consider what McKinsey Global Institute says China's future will look like by the end of 2025 as evidence of why they have no choice but to implement the sweeping changes:

- ▶ 350 million more people will have moved from rural areas to cities (more than the current U.S. population);
- ▶ Six more megacities will have emerged; two will have 20 million residents;
- ▶ 221 cities will have grown to a population in excess of 1 million people (Europe has 35 today);
- ▶ 40 billion square meters of floor space will be built in 5 million buildings; 50,000 of those to be skyscrapers — the equivalent of constructing 10 New York Cities;
- ▶ Its urban market will be twice the size of Germany's and the GDP will have multiplied by five times;
- ▶ Energy demand will have doubled and China will account for around 20 percent of

global energy consumption.

In record time, China propelled itself from No. 11 to the third-largest world economy achieving unparalleled growth without regard for pollution or depletion of resources. China's next five-year plan will emphasize sustainability for both growth and resources and is expected to result in stringent green building requirements.

During my recent tour of Chinese manufacturing plants, I saw new indications of changing attitudes. Whether forced by the central government or voluntarily motivated, green is an increasing theme in both processes and products. "I remember clear skies and sunshine before industrialization and I want to make sure they return for good," said Larry Lin, president of bamboo manufacturer Dasso, as he explained their new process that reduces waste in bamboo flooring production by 50 percent.

In an effort to satisfy the consumers'

hunger for exotic wood species with destroying old forests, several companies have found ecological alternatives. W made Bamboo has already introduced exotic wood looks printed directly on sustainable bamboo substrates. Elegant Liv is also working on a similar technology.

Although China's market is not free of illegally harvested logs, many Chinese companies own their own FSC-certified forests and are in support of sustainable forestry practices.

China has shown that when it decides to do something there is no debate. Who could have closed all of Beijing's factories for a week before the Olympics to let the air clear? Based on China's rate of change and recent accomplishments, some believe they will "leap frog" past the U.S. in implementing green technology and positioning themselves to dominate the global green products industry. Consider:

- ▶ China is already the world's leading solar energy equipment manufacturer and is preparing to launch the first mass-produced electric car;
- ▶ China has doubled its installed wind power every year for the past five years and passed the U.S. in numbers of new wind turbines built in the first half of 2009 and will surpass the U.S. in wind energy production by the end of this year.
- ▶ China is the world's top producer of hydroelectric power. Its Three Gorges Dam, completed in 2008, is the largest hydroelectric power plant in the world.
- ▶ China's current total investment in renewable energy projects is reported at nearly \$12 trillion USD. Some say they are spending \$9 billion USD a month on "energy race."

Certainly barriers exist. They will be burning coal for some time to come but very recently, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory reported that China can pump carbon dioxide from coal-burning smokestacks into the country's unique underground saltwater reservoirs. These reservoirs have enough carbon sequestration capacity to hold decades or even hundreds of years of carbon emissions.

My point? China's building boom will create a new, 40-billion-square-meter laboratory in which to develop and market alternative, green flooring products. Eventually, China may lead the green movement because their future depends upon making sweeping changes. Strategic-mining flooring manufacturers and smart buyers around the world should assess how they will fit into this shifting paradigm.

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