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Green options for apartment, condo dwellers *(Many 'green' products make good fit for apartments and condos)*

By ALEX VEIGA

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Environmentally conscious condo and apartment dwellers can't be blamed for feeling a bit, well, green over those living in detached homes, free to make just about any Earth-friendly renovations they like.

Unless they live in a building with a homeowners association that has embraced the Earth-friendly way, condo owners are decidedly limited by comparison in the range of upgrades they can make to enhance their energy savings.

And renters - often times they're just lucky if they can get permission to paint, much less rip out flooring, countertops and cabinets.

But that's no reason not to take advantage of the trove of products that are now on the market to whittle down that carbon footprint, eradicate airborne toxins and beef up the use of recyclables, experts say.

First the basic stuff:

Russell Albanese, president of the Albanese Organization, which has built several green residential high-rises in New York City, says among the first things condo and apartment residents should do to cut their energy costs is toss out their incandescent light bulbs and replace them with compact fluorescent bulbs or LEDs, light-emitting diodes.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs can range between \$4 and up, with many models above \$10. LEDs with comparable light output to household lamp incandescent lights are typically around \$30.

The next move for condo owners (and for apartment renters, if they can) is use only Energy Star-rated appliances.

Another energy-saver, using programmable thermostats. They can be used to manage when the air conditioning or heat turns on, so that they're on for less time during the day when the unit is empty.

"It can save you a lot of energy if you're away from home a lot," says Jay Hall, a technical consultant for the U.S. Green Building Council, an industry trade group. Indoor air quality can be a significant problem in residential buildings, particularly for renters whose apartments have carpeting.

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified filters for air conditioners can help snatch up small particles of dust and other allergens not captured by conventional filters.

A medical grade Hepa air filtration unit that can absorb chemicals and odors and wipe out nearly all airborne particles. Prices of Hepa-rated air purifiers vary, with models typically around \$100 and up.

Another way to make the air inside an apartment or condo cleaner is to repaint the walls with low volatile organic compounds, or low-VOC paints.

Many are increasingly available and often don't cost a lot more than regular paint. Low or no-VOC interior wall paints can run about \$36 a gallon, while comparable regular paint are around \$20 a gallon.

To help save water, condo owners can try dual-flush toilets (with prices starting around \$400) which give users two options on how much water to use per flush.

For those thinking about redoing their flooring have more environmentally sustainable choices than ever, including reclaimed wood, bamboo, cork and natural linoleum, which is made out of flax seed, linseed oil and other biodegradable materials.

Bamboo and cork flooring come in a variety of finishes. They typically start at around \$3.50 a square foot, with some styles going for twice that or as low as \$2 at some retailers.

Kitchen cabinets can also be redone with similar alternatives to wood, including composite veneer, which can be made to look like exotic woods.

The options for swapping out kitchen counters for more eco-friendly materials now include using recycled bottles and glass recovered from landfills.

Metal, reclaimed wood, and stone are also good alternatives, says Sarah Beatty, founder of New York-based Green Depot, a green home building retailer.

IceStone, one brand of recycled glass used to create countertops for kitchens and bathrooms, generally ranges between \$100 and \$150 a square foot.

"There's no longer any type of compromise with these green products," Beatty said. "They are beautiful, there's much more of a range, (and) they're easier as far as installation goes."

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