



handsOn

A Newsletter of the
Boston Building Materials Co-op and
the Building Materials Resource Center

Fall/Winter 2001

Energy Consumption Lunacy

By John Rowse

“The events of September 11th have inspired some serious rethinking of a whole range of issues, from airline safety to intelligence gathering. . . . this should also be the perfect time for a measured reassessment of the nation’s energy strategy.”

— Enlightenment on Energy, *New York Times*,
lead editorial, 10/22/01

The impetus for the birth of Boston Building Materials Co-op was the energy crisis of 1978. People waited in long lines for gasoline. Oil for heating was in scarce supply. We wondered: Would there be oil to heat our houses that winter?

Our lack of understanding of the basis for that crisis continues today. The US accounts for 6% of the world’s population — and consumes more than 25% of the world’s oil. This fact is illustrated by the latest fuel efficiency report on US automobiles: From 1990 to 2000, fuel efficiency dropped from 22mpg to 20mpg. Our disproportionate and growing consumption of oil intensifies our dependence on the Middle East and other oil producing nations — with enormous human and environmental costs.

We are currently witnessing a heroic and patriotic response to the terrorist acts of September 11th. We must, as a nation, make heroic efforts to reduce our consumption, increase our efficiency, and promote conservation. We must spend a lot more time and money looking at the “demand side” of the

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Our Bread and Butter: A Tribute to Our Building Materials Donors

By Matthew St. Onge

The community of building materials donors at the Building Materials Resource Center is vast and varied: homeowners, small and large construction companies, colleges and universities, corporations and hospitals, retail and wholesale building supply companies, architects.

The BMRC opened its (trailer) doors for business in January, 1994. Since then, the volume and quality of building materials donations have surpassed all of our expectations. While the founders of the BMRC were betting on healthy donations of building materials otherwise headed for the landfill, they did not anticipate the level of generosity that donors exhibited

from the start. Neither did they anticipate the quality, which was very high. Welcome surprises, both of them.

Homeowners doing home renovations or who have good quality “stuff” stashed away in their basements have always been the backbone of our community of donors. To this day, homeowners account for 75% of all donations to the BMRC.

While there is not enough space in this article to highlight the many memorable and generous donors, a few examples are worth noting.

There’s **Karen from Andover**, who hired a U-Haul truck to transport her cherry cabinets

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Resources to Help Pay High Utility Bills This Winter

Thank You All:

Year 2000 Building Materials Donors and Financial Contributors



Weatherization Materials Sold at the Co-op

By Don Malloy

With the coming of winter, it is time to think about some of the ways available to both save money on heating bills and increase the comfort level of your living space. The Co-op continues to be a retailer of a wide range of weatherization materials, supplies, and helpful advice, suitable for homeowners and tenants alike.

One of our biggest sellers is a three-piece **Door Kit** (2 side pieces, 1 top), which comes as a primed wood and Q-Ion weather-stripping set-up, costing \$9.50. The kit can be cut to size with a hacksaw or small handsaw and is easily installed onto the existing door frame using small nails. Used in conjunction with an aluminum and vinyl triple flange **Door Sweep** for \$2.35 (to block drafts coming in at the bottom of the door), drafty doors will be a thing of the past.

Due to our ever-improving web site (www.bbmc.com), we are becoming nationally known as a supplier of **Hard-to-Find Window Repair Parts**, including a wide range of specialty tools, sash chain, and many different window weather-stripping materials. All items are in stock and free installation advice is always included.

One of our biggest selling low-cost weatherization items is our **Interior Storm Window Kits**. The kit includes a brown or white plastic frame, which is attached to the wood window frame, and a clear plastic sheet which then slips into the framing like a zip-lock bag. Window kits are especially suited for tenants and often pay for themselves in one heating season. Selling for only \$6.00 per window, these kits are simple to install, work like a dream, and are a bargain to boot.

Other materials available for windows include a wide range of **Caulking Materials** as well as **Expanding Foam** and **Backer Rod** for those larger gaps.

More expensive energy saving products are available at the Co-op as well, including a wide range of **Replacement Windows, Doors, and a Variety of Storm Windows and Storm Doors**. We are one of the only retailers of Harvey products in the area and we believe that their Tru-Channel storm window is by far the best storm window available today. Come by and see our display model.

Another weatherization product at the Co-op helps you to use your heating system more efficiently. Our popular **Double Setback Thermostat** allows you to automatically set the temperature for different times during the day, with a separate program for the weekend.

Although the Co-op does not get directly involved with furnaces and boilers per se, we do have the **Supplies Needed to Insulate Your Home's Heat Distribution System** (which is recommended for

most heating systems). More specifically, we loan out **Pipe Calipers**, which are what you need to measure the different sizes of heating pipes running through the basement. The next step is to place an order for **Fiberglass Pipe Insulation**. Forced hot air systems require fiberglass duct wrap, which we have as a stock item.

As always, our knowledgeable staff are here to help with any and all of your weatherization projects. Stop by or give us a call.

SHOP NEWS

The Co-op is pleased to welcome **Rafael Quezada** as our new, multi-talented Shop Assistant. Rafael spends Tuesdays and Saturdays in the Shop repairing members' windows and screens, assembling Door Kits (for weatherizing), and helping with other Shop-related projects as they arise. Please take a moment to welcome Rafael the next time you are in.

Co-op Shop and Power Tools Available for Carpentry and Other Projects. Most Co-op and BMRC members are familiar with our Shop as a place to repair their windows and screens. What you may not know (or have forgotten) is that our Shop is available for other projects as well. We have a table saw, band saw, drill press, electric mitre box, and numerous other tools that most homeowners do not own themselves. Shop time is \$40.00/hr, charged in 15 minute increments. You tell us what you want to do; we provide the expertise to help you do it. Call for details and to schedule Shop time.

Answering Your Questions About Kitchen Countertops

By Linda Lesyna

Many people come to the Co-op seeking information about the different countertop options available. In this article, I have set out to answer your questions and, hopefully, make your job of picking the right countertop a little easier.

The most common countertops used in kitchens are plastic laminate, solid surface, stone, and wood butcher block.

Plastic laminate countertops are probably the most familiar of these. Plastic laminate countertops are made of layers of kraft paper laminated with glue and finished with a top coat that has color, design, and texture. Brand names include Formica, Wilsonart, Nevamar, and Pionite. Plastic laminate countertops are one of the most economical kitchen surfaces and have the most color choices. They are fairly durable but will scratch and burn. Keep in mind that once the surface of a laminate countertop is marred, it cannot be repaired.

There are several edge options with plastic laminate countertops. "Postform" is a factory molded top with an integral backsplash and several edge

options. Postform tops are available in numerous stock colors but are limited to depths of 22 1/4 inches, 25 1/4 inches, 27 inches and 36 inches. Postform countertops cannot be used for diagonal or rounded corners.

Two important advantages of postform countertops are the seamless joints between tops and back-splashes, and their low cost.

Custom plastic laminate countertops are made to order and will, therefore, fit any size or configuration. Custom plastic laminate tops are available in any brand or color. Edge details include: wood, bevel, self, or solid surface.

Prices for all plastic laminate countertops vary from \$16.00 to \$50.00 per linear foot.

Solid surface countertops are made of man-made composite materials. In contrast to laminate countertops, where the color or pattern is on the top layer only, the color or pattern in solid surface countertops is solid throughout. Like laminate countertops, solid surface countertops will scratch and burn; the difference is that damage to solid

surface tops can be sanded out. Brand names include Corian, Fountainhead, Gibraltar, and Swanstone.

Advantages of solid surface countertops include: color choices that look and feel like stone (but are softer and warmer in temperature), unlimited options for edge details, and seamless tops with undermount sinks.

Solid surface countertops run from \$100.00 to \$200.00 per linear foot and must be manufactured and installed by a licensed fabricator.

Stone countertops are most commonly available in granite and, less often, soapstone. They come in a number of different colors and each piece is unique. Because individual stones come in different sizes, larger tops may require seams.

Stone countertops offer numerous edge details. The more complex the detail, however, the greater the cost. Most stone surfaces are incredibly durable and will not scratch or burn. Because stone is so hard, however, it has no resiliency; if you drop a glass

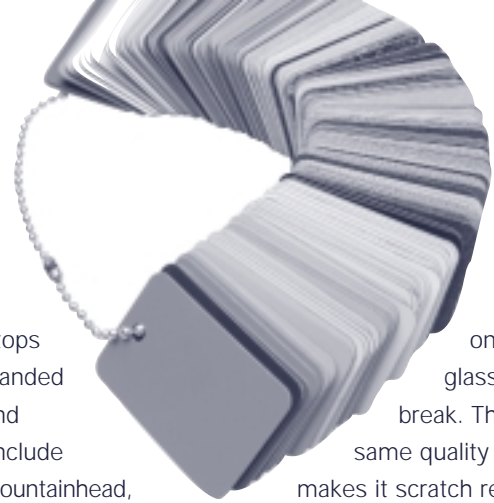
on it, the glass will break. This is the same quality that makes it scratch resistant and able to tolerate extreme temperature variations.

Stone countertops can vary greatly in price, from \$150.00 to \$300.00 per linear foot.

Butcher-block countertops are usually made of laminated strips of hard maple. Most come with an oil finish that is easily renewed as it wears. There are standard sizes available so seams may be necessary on large or irregular shapes. It is a good surface for cutting and is fairly heat resistant. It is not recommended near sinks because water will stain it.

Butcher block countertops run between \$40.00 and \$60.00 per linear foot.

There is no countertop that will meet all of your needs. The key is balancing function with cost and what visually pleases you. It's definitely worth spending the time learning about the different choices before deciding which one will work best for your particular needs.



Fearful Of High Fuel Bills This Winter?

There are a number of special programs designed to help lower-income people keep up with high heating bills this winter. Here are a couple that you may want to look into:

The State of Massachusetts

is offering up to \$500 (or more!) in fuel and utility assistance this winter to income-eligible households. Call 1-800-632-8175 to find out if you qualify and for an application. Boston residents

call Action for Boston Community Development at 617-357-6012.

Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program delivers half-price home heating oil to poor and elderly households in Massachusetts. If you're having trouble making ends meet, call Citizens Energy at 1-877-JOE-4-OIL (1-877-563-4645). The Citizens Energy Oil Heat Program runs from December 2001 through mid-March 2002.

BMRC Launches Website

www.bostonbmrc.org

The BMRC is pleased to announce the completion of its new website, www.bostonbmrc.org Check it out!

Earthshare New England Welcomes BMRC Into The Fold

Earlier this year, EarthShare New England (formerly Environmental Federation of New England) invited the BMRC to join dozens of other environmental organizations as a nonprofit member of their organization. EarthShare conducts United Way-like campaigns in companies in and around New England and distributes the income from

those campaigns to its non-profit members. So... if your workplace is conducting an EarthShare campaign, be sure to participate! To find out how your company can participate, call EarthShare a call at 617.542.3366 or contact them via their website, www.greenfornewengland.org.

BMRC News

Goodbye and Hello

The BMRC bid farewell this past summer to **Jorge Casas**, BMRC Program Manager from 1995 to 2001. Jorge's tenure at the BMRC was marked by tremendous growth and constant change. When he joined us in 1995, we were operating out of metal storage containers in a dirt parking lot. By 1997, Jorge happily occupied a heated office inside our new, 6,000 square foot warehouse. Jorge also witnessed the growth of our customer base from a handful of income-eligible homeowners in 1995 to more than 600 in 2000. Finally, Jorge played an important role in increasing "sales" (the modest fees customers paid for materials and assistance) from \$25,000 in 1995 to a staggering \$193,000 in 2000! We are grateful to Jorge for his hard work during the BMRC's formative years.

We are pleased to welcome **Stephen Selby** as the new BMRC Program Manager. Stephen is the voice you now hear when you call the

Center. He is responsible for managing the building materials donations program and warehouse operations. Stephen brings many years' experience in the construction industry to the BMRC. His vast knowledge about building materials and experience running his own company will serve him (and us) well as manager of this successful, growing project.

Rafael Quezada has joined the BMRC team as Warehouse Assistant. You will find Rafael in the warehouse on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays helping organize, price, and display our ever-changing inventory. Rafael has also joined the Co-op team as Shop Assistant. Every Saturday and Tuesday, Rafael is in the Shop repairing members' windows and screens, preparing Door Kits (for weatherization) and doing other projects as they arise.

BMRC Board Approves New Buying Policy for Non-Members

At their October 2001 meeting, the BMRC Board of Trustees approved a new buying policy for those individuals and families whose incomes exceed the BMRC's income limits.

Effective November 1, 2001, non-income eligible customers

may purchase materials in the BMRC warehouse:

- for 25% more than the marked price, and
- after the items have been in the warehouse for three weeks or longer (to give our income-eligible customers first shot).

Free Wood For Your Fireplace or Woodstove!

Arborway Tree Care in Jamaica Plain has free wood for anyone who is willing to cut, split, and take it away. Call Arborway at 617.522.6071 for details.



Somerville Old House Organization (Soho): A Resource For Old House Owners

You don't have to live in Somerville. . . The Somerville Old House Organization (SOHO) is an active community of old home enthusiasts who exchange practical information, experiences, and ideas on restoring and renovating their older houses. Meetings are generally held on the third Thursday of the month (except August and December) at the Somerville Museum on Westwood Rd. and Central St. from 7:00pm to 9:00pm. For more information call Tony Membrino

at 617.625.5477 or email SOHOMember@aol.com.

SOHO reminds old house owners to think twice about replacement windows.

SOHO thinks you should hold onto those old windows.

Old wooden windows are a character-defining feature of an old house. With a little effort, old windows can

- last for generations, longer than most replacement windows
- be functional and easily repaired

- be energy efficient
- offer craftsmanship and details not found in replacement windows
- add warmth and beauty to a room, and
- help you date the age and style of your home.

For more on the benefits of holding onto those old windows, call or email SOHO at 617.625.5477 or Sohomember@aol.com. Another resource for repairing old windows is www.windowrepair.com.

Re-Wiring: Is it Necessary?

If you are remodeling or adding to an older home, the question is bound to come up sooner or later. Here are a few pointers to help you make an informed decision. If you see any of the following conditions, then re-wiring is in your future:

- any system without a ground (bare) wire;
- cloth insulation or any worn insulation that deteriorates in your hands when you move the wires, creating the potential for dangerous shorts
- less than 20-amp circuits in the kitchen, laundry, or bathrooms
- lights that dim as a result of an appliance being turned on
- a fuse box, because it generally indicates an obsolete system and that you need new wiring, a new panel, and probably a grounded, or GFCI-protected, system
- The presence of branch-circuit aluminum wire. If you find this, call an electrician.

Wish List

- **Conference room table**
- **Color, laser printer**

energy equation — researching and developing alternative energy sources, promoting conservation and fuel efficiency. And we must spend a lot *less* time and money on the “supply side” — drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, increasing drilling and oil exports in the Middle East to meet our spiraling demand.

What can we do? The very first thing one can do in the fight against excess energy consumption is to simply think: Turn off the lights when leaving a room. Turn off the faucet while brushing your teeth. Put on a sweater and turn down the thermostat two or three degrees. Nothing will have as big an impact, though, as a change in attitude. Remember: *Our excesses have a profound, far reaching effect on the rest of the world.*

The second thing to do is to review all of your energy consumption centers and set a priority list for the most effective changes you can make. What will save the most money and energy? All of your research and analysis in this area should be founded on a calculation of payback. The place to spend your limited resources is where it will save the most.

I like to remind my fifth grade students of an old Native American proverb: Make decisions based on their effect on the next seven generations. If we did this more often when making decisions about energy consumption, we might find ourselves buying a highly fuel efficient (and reasonably priced) hybrid vehicle instead of that larger, gas guzzling one. We may even decide to get rid of our car altogether and join a car sharing program. (Zip Car is one such outfit in Boston, www.zipcar.com) Or we may be quicker to trade in that electricity hog of a refrigerator for one of the energy saving units available in most appliance stores.

Nothing will have as big an impact. . . as a change in attitude. Remember: Our excesses have a profound, far reaching effect on the rest of the world.

What energy saving measures can you do in your home? Here's a priority list to get you started:

- ☛ Is there adequate insulation in your attic? What would be the payback for installing more?
- ☛ Do you have efficient windows? High quality storm windows will offer the best payback if your existing windows are leaky.
- ☛ How much energy is your washing machine (dishwasher, clothes dryer, refrigerator, oven) using? Consider the payback for purchasing new appliances. It will surprise you to see how much you can save by buying a new refrigerator or washing machine.
- ☛ To determine your current appliances' energy use, ask to borrow the Co-op's energy meter. The energy meter will measure your appliances' energy use, which you may then compare against the energy consumption labels on new appliances. You will then be able to determine the cost and energy-use benefit of purchasing new appliances. Even if the cost is just break even, it's worth doing.
- ☛ Think about the lighting in your home. Energy efficiency in light bulbs has come a long way in the past few years. You would be hard pressed to tell the difference from the light generated by today's compact fluorescent bulb and a regular incandescent bulb. You will definitely be able to tell the difference in your electric bills. The Co-op sells a complete line of energy efficient light bulbs.

For nearly 25 years, we have enjoyed a seemingly endless and comparatively inexpensive supply of oil in this country. But it is not endless and the price is steadily rising. We must — each and every one of us — do our part to conserve energy in our homes and in our daily lives. Remember, think, and you will save money for yourself and energy for the world. Your actions will help to create a clean and peaceful world for “the next seven generations.”

John Rowse founded the Boston Building Materials Co-op in 1978 and was a founding member of the Building Materials Resource Center in 1993.

to our Roxbury warehouse — **and** a four-person crew to deliver them.

There's **Ann from the Town of Concord Recycling Department**, who worked tirelessly to get the word out about the BMRC to Concord residents. And whose hard work paid off with a sharp increase in the number of calls and donations coming in from that town.

There's **Ron from Lexington**, who invited the BMRC to remove whatever we felt we could use from his house

before it was torn down. In the end, Ron donated a beautiful maple kitchen set complete with marble tops and appliances, like-new double patio doors by Marvin, a couple of solid interior doors, and several high quality light fixtures.

Then there are our corporate donors.

There's **Van Lumber of Bellingham**, a steady donor of brand new lumber, doors, and moldings since 1999. Whose owners were so committed to promoting re-use that they went before the Bellingham

Board of Appeals to secure a tax exemption for the 8' x 20' trailer they wanted to park in their lot to store materials headed for the BMRC. (A big thank you to **Next Phase Studios Architects in Jamaica Plain** for donating the trailer!)

There's **Metropolitan Kitchens in Westwood**, who in 1999 and 2000 donated well over \$100,000 in brand new, slightly damaged, mis-ordered, and display cabinets to the BMRC.

There's **Roma Tile in Watertown** and **Fitzgerald Tile in Woburn**, whose truck-loads of brand new ceramic

and marble tile and luxury vinyl flooring were so popular that they were gone within two days of their arrival in our warehouse.

There's **Bradford Carpet in Saugus**, whose owners have donated countless rolls of brand new, very high quality carpet and vinyl flooring to the delight of our customers.

There's **Frankie Lieberman of Historic Hues in Boston**, a small, high-end builder, who for years has gone out of her way — and paid out of her pocket — to painstakingly remove good quality items from her clients' homes and deliver them to our door.

There's **J&C Adams in Cambridge**, whose recent delivery of brand new windows and doors, worth over \$20,000, were quickly dispensed to our income-eligible customers.

There are so many others who are a part of the BMRC's ever-growing community of donors. **To each and every one of you, THANK YOU.** Thank you for helping prevent the needless disposal of perfectly good building materials into landfills. And thank you for helping to improve the homes — and the lives — of Boston's lower-income homeowners.

The BMRC is a good idea that works. Thanks to all of you. *(See the complete list of 2000 building materials donors inside this issue.)*

a real ice breaker

Several years ago we set out to find a product that would not only help our customers deal with the slippery, icy, conditions of winter but also be environmentally safe. **The result is our Co-op Melt.** Co-op Melt is a unique combination of an ingredient that breaks up ice (used on runways at Logan Airport) and sand, which creates traction and reduces slipping.

If you'd like to try a remarkable product that minimizes groundwater pollution, damage to trees and landscaping, the corrosion of metals and concrete, yet still achieves the same safety results as traditional toxic ice salts, try our Co-op Melt.

Come by the BBMC for your Co-op Ice Melt.

Boston Building Materials Co-op

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handsOn

HandsOn is the semi-annual newsletter of the Boston Building Materials Co-op and Building Materials Resource Center.

The Boston Building Materials Co-op is a member-controlled building materials retailer and technical assistance provider. Founded in 1978, we specialize in cabinets, counters, windows, and doors. We offer a range of affordable homeowner support services, including in-home consults, phone and office consults, educational workshops, a Tradesperson Referral File, a lending library, and a Saturday morning window and screen repair clinic. You don't have to be a member to shop at the Co-op, though members get product discounts and other benefits.

Contact the BBMC at:

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.2262 • **fax** 617.427.2491
email info@bbmc.com • **web** www.bbmc.com

The Building Materials Resource Center is the nonprofit spin-off of the Boston Building Materials Co-op. Founded in 1993, the BMRC is a building materials re-use project. We accept donations of good quality used and surplus building materials and distribute them, for a very modest fee, to income-eligible homeowners and nonprofits. Many of the homeowner support services of the Co-op — in-home consults, phone and office consults, workshops, window shop — are available to BMRC customers for a reduced price.

Contact the BMRC at:

100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120
phone 617.442.8917 • **fax** 617.427.2491
email info@bbmc.com
web www.bostonbmrc.org

The Building Materials Resource Center is a nonprofit building materials re-use project. Your tax deductible gift will help us divert perfectly good building materials from landfills and deliver them into the hands of needy homeowners and nonprofits.

Yes, I would like to make a contribution to the Building Materials Resource Center. Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of:

\$200 \$150 \$100 \$75 \$50 \$35

Name _____

Address _____

Please mail your check to: Building Materials Resource Center
100 Terrace Street, Roxbury, MA 02120

Thank you!

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