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Metro receives EPA grant for headquarters renovation project

In constructing its new headquarters, the Metropolitan Service District is practicing what it preaches. The agency is recycling the 73-year-old Sears store in inner northeast Portland into its new headquarters, creating a role model for other commercial building projects in the process. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) wants it to be an example for the nation.

EPA has given Metro a \$30,000 grant to document the "Resourceful Renovation" as a demonstration project. In addition to reusing the existing structure rather than building on vacant land, Metro is salvaging, reusing or recycling most of the waste produced in the renovation process. Recycled building materials are being incorporated where possible. To facilitate recycling once the building is operational, recycling chutes for office paper will be installed in existing shafts.

"We're very proud of the EPA grant and the fact that we're making reuse and recycling work on this public project," said Rena Cusma, Metro executive officer. "Metro's goal is to help contractors deal with construction and demolition waste in a new way."

The grant will fund a part-time, on-site project coordinator, a how-to manual for contractors and developers and an educational slide show. Signs posted outside the construction site are being updated regularly to reflect tons of material recycled or reused on the project. Metro plans to conduct workshops and building tours for the construction industry that focus on the resourceful renovation elements.

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Before demolition work began, Metro arranged for The Salvation Army and The Warehouse Project to remove nine tons of carpet, and Hippo Hardware paid to take away two tons of doors, fixtures, paneling and hardware. Preserved for reuse in the renovated building are cast medallions from the original exterior, portions of existing maple and terrazzo flooring, curving oak bannisters, a two-story water tank that will be transformed into a "think tank" meeting room, and existing shafts that will house recycling chutes.

During the demolition stage, waste materials have been carefully sorted to maximize their recyclability. To date, 165 tons of metal and 9 tons of wood have been recycled; 1,968 tons of damaged bricks, concrete and metal studs were recovered for use in capping the St. Johns landfill. And 50 shrubs from the existing landscaping were transplanted to a residential development in Vancouver. As of April 14, only 20 tons of waste were disposed of as garbage. In the actual build-out stage, Metro expects to recover large quantities of wood, dry wall, metal, cardboard, cement and asphalt for recycling.

All subcontractors on the project are asked to complete a waste management form. Metro provides construction site recycling guides and technical assistance to help subcontractors develop waste management plans. Waste disposal and recycling reports from all subcontractors allow Metro to track the quantities of materials recycled or disposed of over the life of the project.

Construction/demolition debris, much of which is recyclable, makes up approximately 17 percent of the metro area waste stream. The Metro project will provide a real-life example of how those materials can be recovered and how much can be saved through avoided landfill disposal fees.