TRANS-
FORMATION
AGO

Art Gallery of Ontario

A Green AGO

With a growing awareness of environmental issues, a green movement is taking hold worldwide. Topping political agenda and influencing policy, incorporating sustainable technologies into our lives has become the solution to global climate change and museums are no exception.

Museums are typically heavy energy consumers, using more than twice as much as conventional office buildings. Their unique set of requirements to showcase works of art requires constant and reliable climate and light controls. The Transformation AGO expansion project gives the Gallery a chance to be more environmentally aware and implement strategies to be more energy efficient.

Most notably, the AGO's large, 35-year-old water and steam boilers have been replaced with small compact versions, significantly improving their efficiency. As well, the chiller plant has been installed with state-of-the-art variable speed chillers with ozone-friendly refrigerant. This new equipment is one of the most environmentally friendly to be found in buildings today, reducing greenhouse emissions greatly.

The AGO recycles almost all demolition materials including scrap metal, glass, wood, steel and wiring, on an ongoing basis, reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill.

"Although we need to maintain laboratory-like conditions in an art museum we have integrated a range of green features into the building," says Mike Mahoney, senior project manager, construction. "Choosing sustainable materials like plywood underneath our engineered wood flooring, capitalizes on renewable resources."

The construction team is conscientious about protecting the surrounding Grange Park trees. Wooden barriers encase existing trees to resist any falling debris or crane miscalculations. Storm water collected from the roof and stored in a retention tank below ground delays the surge of water entering the city's sewage treatment plants, which often will not receive proper treatment prior to re-entering Lake Ontario. At the rear of the building, storm water will flow into Grange Park below grade in perforated piping that will water trees and use natural ground filtration rather than treatment plants.

The AGO is taking great efforts to use more environmentally friendly products in the daily cleaning of the building by completely eliminating the use of acid-based cleaning products as well as all products containing ammonia and butyls.

"We have moved to friendlier chemicals for the rare times we have to strip floors, and have found alternatives to waxing for almost all the floor surfaces so that harsh stripping isn't necessary," says Warren Wilson, manager of Facility Services. "We are also using chemicals that are formulated for use with cold water to eliminate inhalation of chemical vapours."

The toilet paper the AGO uses is 100% recycled material and has received the Green Seal, which is an environmental standard for bleaching, deinking and packaging. Whenever possible, the Plant Operations team uses compact fluorescent lights, which are more energy efficient and last much longer than traditional lights.

The Transformation AGO project is approaching environmental issues with commitment. Although the priority is the safety of the artwork, the AGO is integrating a range of green features that will prove to be cost effective and benefit our community.

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