

Mountain Equipment Co-op
1550 Granville Street
(902) 421-2667
(ask for Christine Krochak to get a tour)
www.mec.ca



Introduction

Mountain Equipment Co-op is a member-owned co-operative committed to environmental sustainability. Their organizational vision includes, “leadership for a just world, and action for a healthy planet”. They work toward this vision in every way – from product design to building design. MEC’s Green Building Program attempts to reduce the environmental ‘footprint’ of their retail stores across Canada.

MEC secured a lease on a decrepit building on Granville Street in Halifax. They received permission from the owner to renovate the building according to green principles on the agreement that they would pay a lower rent once the renovation was completed in 2001. The building is approximately 17 000² feet and is staffed by about 28 people. Despite limitations involved in leasing, MEC has made a commendable effort in greening their building.



Embodied Energy

Before MEC renovated its Halifax location in 2001 the building, formally the old Paramount Theatre, was aging and in poor repair. Instead of demolishing it, MEC recognized the embodied energy held in the building and carefully preserved the original structure. They removed a section of the brick wall, just large enough to bring in the equipment needed to dig a basement and lay four cement floors, leaving as much of the old brick visible as possible.

Air Quality

To avoid off-gasing, water based, low –VOC paints were used on the walls and the flooring is simply pigmented concrete coated with wax. In many areas MEC left original surfaces untouched (as you can see with the brick wall in the picture above).

Energy and Water Conservation

The kitchen hot water is stored in an insulated tank to avoid having to boil it for each use, thus saving electricity and ultimately reducing greenhouse gas emissions. MEC also has automated motion-sensing lights in the offices, back stock area and the washrooms to prevent the lights from being left on. They purchase biofuel from Wilsons to run their building. In the summer the air conditioning is set to 21° instead of 23°, which is typical of most business and commercial spaces. MEC's thermally efficient windows further reduce energy consumption by heating and cooling the building. All the toilets and taps are low flush, low-flow and aerated. Green renovations do pay off in the long run although they may be more expensive upfront. For example, MEC's energy and water bills are lower because of the energy saving features of the building.



Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

In addition to their careful waste management during the renovation process, in 2006 MEC diverted 91% of their waste from the landfill by recycling it. They vigilantly monitor their garbage and conduct 'garbage audits' each year to determine what is creating the most waste and how they can reduce it. All the merchandise that is returned is resold at a lower price through twice yearly Gear Swap events or donated to avoid creating more garbage. They also have a 'shoe box' in the store where people can bring in their old shoes to donate them to a charity, and they recycle customer's old batteries, cell phones and ink cartridges.

'Greening the Staff and Customers'

If you bring your lunch to MEC in Styrofoam or plastic you may not be able to live it down! The staff aims to use re-usable dishware whether they bring their own lunch or eat out.

MEC is an advocate for the environment and sets an example for others. To educate people on green building techniques they have set up 10 placards with information on the green building initiatives throughout the store. You call Christine Krochak at 902-421-2667 to set up a tour, or next time you need to pick up some rock climbing gear you can take a self-tour of MEC's green building!

Sustainable Transportation

MEC is located near several bus routes and bike racks are conveniently installed outside the store.

Problems Encountered

Some of the other MEC stores have more liberty to green their buildings due to more suitable site locations, more flexible provincial codes and because they may own their buildings. For example, MEC was unable to install composting toilets because of how the building is situated. HRM will not accept the compostable bags that some of the other MEC stores use. Instead, MEC provides their costumers with the option to refuse a bag or use a recycled one. For every bag that MEC saves, they donate five cents to a local Urban Sustainability Grant recipient. In the past one and half years, MEC Halifax has donated \$6,000 through this Grant program – using the money they have saved on bags! However, sometimes Members are worried that they will be suspected of stealing if they don't put their purchase in that piece of plastic! On the other hand, many Members will go to great lengths to avoid a bag. The manager related a story of a man who bought a great deal of gear and tied up the bottom of a pair of pants to carry his purchases!