

FAQ's

What is sustainability?

Sustainability is about improving efficiencies by integrating design, construction and operations of any home, apartment, facility or business through an integrated and coordinated sustainable approach. This process is about improving your building design, reducing your environmental footprint, improving occupant comfort and reducing your running costs. It is a scientific and proven practice that provides myriad of proven and measurable benefits to any project.

Why do we need it?

The current awareness of climate change and how it is affecting us, together with the amount of waste, inefficiency and pollution we have based our culture around, demands a sustainable approach. It is smart practice for the small home or the large business. As the costs of irreplaceable Natural Capital increase, it will make even more business sense.

In addition, when you consider that over 80% of all buildings in Australia are incorrectly designed for the climate of their location, it is easy to see how improving the design and therefore the comfortability of any structure would be of great benefit to occupants and to improving operational efficiencies.

How do we do it?

By making the commitment to a sustainable outcome, then ensuring you integrate your design, construct and operations in any built environment to create a sustainable result. It requires the use of assorted design and operational concepts that when correctly implemented result in a functional sustainable outcome.

What will it cost me?

The Building Code of Australia (BCA) says between .6% and 2% of project cost. In many cases it will cost you a lot less than what it will save you in a relatively short period of time. In many cases it won't cost you any more than a construction cost incurred with a non sustainable approach. In some cases it will cost you less.

The Green Building Council (USA) says between 0-2% of construction cost but with a 10 times repayment over 20 years in energy efficiency alone. This doesn't include all the other benefits, financial, environmental and otherwise.

The greatest benefits are achieved the earlier sustainable practice is agreed as a project basis.

None the less significant benefits can be gained if you are simply refurbishing your building. (see below)

See our links page for some of the documented evidence from around the world for the cost benefits of a sustainable approach.

How will it benefit me?

The list of benefits is too long to list here but they include:

- Improved comfortability without powered ventilation
- Reduced running costs
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Reduced water consumption
- Improved daylighting
- Improved functionality
- Improved profitability
- Reduced maintenance
- Improved resale
- Improved marketability
- Improved occupant health
- Improved productivity

How does VIM Consulting assist me?

What we do is undertake design, build or operations analysis and diagnosis of your project, at concept stage, during design or construction, post construction or during operations and use our software expertise, sustainability analysis and diagnostic knowledge to provide a recommendations report or proposals that can then be used as the sustainability framework by the designers of your project such as your architect, your mechanical or electrical or hydraulic designer etc. This information can then be analysed further by us to provide actual forecast cost savings in running expenses and green house gas emissions. We can also then provide information to show how much more comfortable your building will be in addition to highlighting the actual reductions in chemical emissions etc for your internal environment and building operations.

Our reports/expertise can also provide diagnoses of your operational shortcomings. We can then highlight potential for improvement and possible cost savings.

Our expertise in reviewing design and construction specifications and procedures as well as improving value for your project is another great service we offer.

We provide benefit all the way through your project; a 'cradle to the grave' service!

Does sustainability apply to small residential projects?

Absolutely! The benefits for the smallest residences are significant.

Does sustainability work with major sized projects?

Absolutely! The benefits to major projects are very significant.

How long to get a return?

This depends on many factors and how you value your return. In some case the benefits can be realised and paid for within 12 months. There is a range of documented evidence on the cost benefits of sustainability. See our links page for some of the financial benefits reports.

Will it really benefit the environment?

Sustainable practice is a proven methodology that will bring significant reductions to energy use and therefore green house gases, water use, waste output and will also significantly reduce the emission of toxic chemicals in the internal environment. In addition, it will improve occupant comfortability, learning and health outcomes and the longevity of the building.

Can your company help my project comply with council or authority approvals?

We have a thorough understanding of sustainability requirements for councils and authorities and can provide a written sustainable solutions report using diagnostic and analysis tools to show how your project will comply with, or in many cases exceed, council or authority requirements. We can provide alternative solutions for your compliance and in many cases we work with councils to assist in frame working their sustainable approval criteria. We can also provide design recommendations that will define the initial control framework for your new or refurbished project which your architect will then incorporate into your project design.

What is local climate modelling?

This is a process where the local climate is analysed with specialised software and then the results are incorporated into the design criteria for the design of your building. This will ensure the building is designed specifically for the local climate it will exist in.

What is building thermal assessment modelling?

This is the process where by the building thermal envelope and other related thermal comfort contributors are analysed by assorted complicated software programmes and sustainability expertise to ascertain the appropriate design criteria for the specific building structure and passive climate control features. Solar radiance, glare, cross flow ventilation, thermal mass benefits ,night purging ,daylighting analysis etc are all examined with the results having a great influence on design and operational criteria.

Will sustainability make my building more comfortable?

Most definitely .Most buildings in Australia are not designed with the climate or functionality of the building considered at all so the benefits of ensuring your building is cooler in summer and warmer in winter without using energy draining mechanical or electrical systems ,are obvious. Too many buildings are built to a formula and are not in any way relative to their climate, their function or the environment.

The building will also be a lot less toxic to inhabit, use less water, and possibly, in some cases, become self sufficient.

What is the .A.I.P.M?

The Australian Institute of Project Managers (A.I.P.M) is the premium association for project managers through out Australia. To become a member you must provide evidence of your experience and qualifications. Members must have achieved a certain standard of project management expertise as per the Australian National Competency Standards (ANCSMP) requirements.

What is the AGDF?

The Australian Green Development Forum (AGDF) was formed in Queensland in 2002 and is a body that promotes sustainable practice Australia wide.

What is ABSA?

Association of Building Sustainability Assessors is the only Australian body that accredits sustainability assessors. They are the organisation that provides the training and accreditation of building sustainability consultants in the use of AccuRate™ (and other software) building thermal modelling software. They monitor the work of their approved assessors, their progress and their sustainability assessments.

What is BASIX?

The building sustainability index for residential homes and apartments (BASIX) in NSW was initiated in 2004 by the Department of Planning (NSW) to reduce water and power consumption. It is a prerequisite in NSW for all homes to comply with a certain BASIX rating depending on their actual location. BASIX is a tool designed to measure energy consumption. The home owner can do their own assessment but if the home is not a standard design it may become too difficult for the owner to ensure compliance with the BASIX requirements.

What is AccuRate™?

AccuRate™ is the latest second generation thermal modelling rating tool for residential buildings. Designed by the C.S.I.R.O, it provides a precise thermal analysis of your residential building and indicates what your energy consumption will be for that design in a specific location. It also enables you to change certain components of the design to improve energy demand outcomes. It is due to be accredited by the Department of Planning for BASIX ratings by December, 2006. Once approved it will supersede the NATHERS Rating tool in NSW and will be able to be used for BASIX Assessments. It is currently accredited for use in Western Australia. Only accredited assessors can use the tool for official rating purposes.

What will our service cost?

This is dependent on the type of project, the type of diagnosis or analysis specified, the status of project (whether it is in design, DA, Construction or Greenfield stage), the results required, the location etc. Some small projects will cost only a few hundred dollars; others will be in their thousands.

Overall for the benefit we provide, our costs are usually comparatively at the very low end of consultants fees in the built environment.

We work on a set fee, an hourly rate or a percentage of overall project cost. We can discuss this aspect with you and provide a costing framework that is acceptable to you, our client.

We firmly believe that 'We will save you a lot more than we cost you'!

AccuRate™ is a Trademark

How long will your report take?

Some reports take from a few days to a couple of months, depending on the scale of the project, the type of the report, the research required, current work loads and the status of the project.

What is a Green Star rating?

This is a tool developed by the Property Council and major players in the construction industry to provide a benchmark 'Green' rating tool for your project. It is a cutting edge, thorough process that ensures your building's overall design and operations achieve a verifiable benchmark. It is currently in existence for offices, shopping centres and healthcare buildings but tools for residential, education and factories etc should be operational by middle of 2007.

What does Section 'J' of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) mean for me?

Section 'J' is a new energy efficiency regulation from the Commonwealth government which became law for most states on May 2006. It applies to all classes of buildings, except in NSW, where, for instance, residential buildings have to comply with BASIX requirements and only one Section 'J' requirement.

The expected cost penalty to comply with requirements is expected to be between .6%-2% of overall construction cost and this expected to be returned in energy savings within a period of 2- 6 years depending on the type of building. (BCA RIS 2005). The larger the use of energy the greater the savings in a shorter time frame. In reality, it is simply ensuring good design practice and if a building has a problem complying with the requirements then it would be fair to say it initially had a deficient design basis. In many cases the cost will be neutral as a well designed building envelope can significantly reduce the size and usage of mechanical ventilation and can reduce lighting requirements etc.

Will sustainability work on a renovation?

Absolutely. There is much that can be achieved with a renovated building. Don't be misled into believing that sustainability only applies to new structures. Properly integrated refurbishment design as well as appropriate building technology can reap significant benefits for any refurbishment project. In a renovation you are generally removing building fabric and structure as well as services. This alone allows you the opportunity to change what you put back for the better. Improved glazing and daylighting, thermal envelope, internal environment quality and services are just some of the ways refurbished buildings can be improved.