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THE EDITOR'S CORNER

The Green Orthodontist

As I write this, the United States is facing the greatest environmental catastrophe in its history. The extent of damage to the Gulf Coast from this massive oil spill is dramatically mirrored in the economic loss to the businesses and communities of the region. The total impact on the global economy has yet to be calculated. Perhaps the only positive result of this calamity will be a clarion call for us all to do everything we can to protect the environment.

One of the topics covered by Dr. Jack Sheridan in this month's Readers' Corner is the issue of "green" orthodontics. In a nutshell, practicing green orthodontics means choosing to use the most environmentally friendly techniques, procedures, and materials available. A few of the respondents to our survey said they would implement green practices only if they were cost-effective, believing their own offices' impact on the environment to be negligible. Of course, you could say the same thing about each of the individual oil globules that make up the Gulf oil spill. What would be the environmental impact of all orthodontic, dental, and other health-care practitioners considered together? Other Readers' Corner participants were more altruistic about green practices, calling them "the right thing to do". Although touting green orthodontics as a marketing ploy seems off-target, the positive feelings generated in patients, parents, and others with regard to the office's environmental awareness could only be beneficial in the long run.

Respondents listed a number of green practices that can easily be implemented. Digital radiography eliminates the need for darkroom chemicals and the accompanying toxic-waste-disposal problems. It also reduces the need for hard-copy prints of x-rays. While few offices have yet achieved true paperless office management, the goal remains a worthy one, and most orthodontists seem headed in that direction. Other areas in which our readers have taken action to reduce their environmental impact involve the use of more environmentally friendly chemicals for office sanitation, increased recycling of orthodontic materials, and energy-efficient general lighting.

The office pictured on the cover of this issue of JCO is a prime example of environmentally friendly design. Built in 2009 for Dr. Nancy O'Neill of New Freedom, Pennsylvania, it simulates one of the Amish horse barns common to the area. According to the architect, Wes Burton of Masterplan Architects & Builders in Towson, Maryland, the office's green features include insulated glazing and doors, with a Zerodraft air seal; locally produced timber framing, natural stone-accent flooring, and concrete countertops; economizer controls and insulated ductwork for the heating and air-conditioning system; tankless

water heaters; LED cable lighting; structurally insulated roof panels with daylighting through the roof; enhanced flash and batt wall insulation; slab insulation; and oversize ceiling fans.

We may not all be able to go as far as Dr. O'Neill, but surely any of these measures could at least be considered by orthodontists who are building or remodeling their offices. The Readers' Corner indicates that orthodontists as a group are concerned about reducing their environmental footprints. If we all take small steps, our collective impact will be great.

RGK

[Click here to see more photos of Dr. O'Neill's office \(1MB PDF file\).](#)