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AOC's corporate headquarters to be built with green features for LEED certification

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AOC LLC has started construction on its new corporate headquarters with an eye on the environment.

The Collierville-based company is seeking a silver LEED certification for its new corporate home, scheduled to be completed by late 2008.

AOC, a manufacturer and marketer of unsaturated polyesters and vinyl ester resins, started as a joint venture between **Alpha Corp.** and Owens Corning in 1994. The privately held Alpha Corp. bought Owens Corning's joint venture interest in 1998.

The company now has six manufacturing locations in the U.S., Canada and in Mexico.

One of the company's issues was utilizing its space. It had corporate employees and research and development people spread across different buildings.

"It is a matter of both inefficiency and difficulty in working together when you have people split," says Steve Martin, director for global communications for AOC. "What really drove the decision to do it now was to get people in like functions together so they can work better."

Therefore, AOC decided to build an \$8 million, 49,350-square-foot building to hold about 70 executives and support staff.

Allen & Hoshall, Inc. is the project's engineering firm, **Montgomery Martin Contractors LLC** is the general contractor and McGehee Nicholson Burke Architects PC is designing it.

The move allows AOC's research and development people to move into the former corporate space and expand.

"In our industry, research and development work is primary and it is most important for them to have the space they need instead of bumping elbows," Martin says.

The company decided to pursue LEED certification because it wanted to follow best practices in its office space, similar to how it follows best practices in its manufacturing, Martin says.

One of the ways the company is going for silver LEED certification is through the use of a

geothermal HVAC system.

The system uses the earth's underground temperature as a heat exchanger.

It sends water deep into the ground, where it adjusts to a certain temperature naturally.

Then the water is returned to the building for heating and cooling purposes.

The geothermal system takes the place of more traditional methods such as a condensing unit, boiler and cooling tower.

"The geothermal system is efficient in several ways," says Randy Bratton, vice president at Montgomery Martin. "It eliminates a cooling tower and a boiler and uses the earth's constant temperature underground to dissipate the heat generated by the system's compressors."

Savings from the geothermal HVAC system could pay for the unit's cost in 5-7 years.

There are other paybacks as well, according to Martin.

"Also you are using renewable, natural resources to heat and cool your building, rather than using fossil fuels, which are expensive and which look like they will continue to be expensive," he says.

The building will have other features in order to gain silver LEED certification, including occupancy sensors that can turn off lights when no one is in a room.

During the construction process, Montgomery Martin will be using recyclable materials in the building and local indigenous plants around it. It will also be using lumber certified by the **U.S. Green Building Council**, the organization which assigns LEED certification. This lumber comes from forests which are being managed for renewable and environmental impact.

AOC's new corporate headquarters is being built on 64 acres it owns, so there are other expansion possibilities, especially in research and development.

"This is really the first step in getting all our engineers and researchers together," Martin says. "Likely, at some point there will have to be additional facilities for their growth."

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