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Media Release

Sustainability still a dirty word in residential development

There are few new topics obsessing the property industry more than sustainability. But builders are struggling to embrace the new whims of the buyer.

The Australian Cooperative Research Centre for **Construction Innovation** has a number of research projects underway aimed at changing the culture of the construction industry so that sustainability becomes No 1.

For instance, a competition underway within **Construction Innovation's DISCOVER** project is helping solve specific problems with urban land shortages, at the same time as finding sustainable solutions and innovative alternatives to issues such as sloping sites.

The construction industry has long been happy with the technique of cut and fill, where the builder digs out the soil, pours a slab and builds a brick veneer suburban home no matter what the climate or land type. But this is a tradition fast becoming unsuitable to the Australian urban landscape where there is not only an increasingly reduced stock of usable land, but buyers attitudes are changing.

Increasingly the buyer wants a smart and sustainable home design, they want intelligent features for the home such as wireless technology, and they want good construction solutions, so that the house is prepared for whatever may come now or in the future, global warming being one good example.

As part of the competition, QUT students are being groomed by professionals from the property and construction industry to develop their ideas. They are looking at problems obsessing all home owners, like how to preserve the natural environment, how to maximise space, what to do with water run-off, and so on.

The competition has 2 categories: 1. design a house combining smart and sustainable home design, using intelligent features of the home, and 2. use engineering and construction solutions.

According to Dr Jay Yang, Project Leader of the **DISCOVER** project, this is one of the unique features of the competition.

"For the first time, students are being asked to combine intelligent features of the home with sustainable outcomes," he said.

"It is also a unique attempt at bringing all project stakeholders together to tackle sustainable residential development issues – today, this is an important part of the Australian way of life."

Dr Keith Hampson, CEO of **Construction Innovation** agrees the scope of the project is breaking new ground.

"The competition is just one element of **Construction Innovation's DISCOVER** project which has been specifically designed to reward a change in culture in the property and construction industry, so that all stakeholders learn to think of sustainability as their first choice in design and construction," he said.

Two winners will receive \$2000 each, plus their winning designs and/or solutions will be built, after appropriate professional improvement. 'Springfield Land Corporation', as well as donating the prize money, has initially donated two blocks of sloping land to the project.

Construction of the students' designs is expected to begin late 2003. Dr Yang says that once the homes are built, they will meet an identified gap for home buyers.

"There is a lack of "worked examples" to educate home buyers for environmentally friendly and intelligent alternatives," he said.

"There is also a shortage of skilled tradesmen in the area of sustainability, but we are working on changing that within the **DISCOVER** project."

A set of integrated development guidelines on smart and sustainable homes is being created for builders, consultants and homebuyers, obtained from monitoring, evaluating and assessing design, construction and home performance data.

The **DISCOVER** project in particular will help solve specific design and construction problems associated with the reduced stock of usable land in urban areas (eg. 40% of available blocks at 'Springfield' are sloping sites).

It will also be a tangible example for the residential construction industry on how to initiate design, develop and implement smart and sustainable homes.

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The Cooperative Research Centre for **Construction Innovation** is a collaboration involving 19 industry, government and research partners and has been made possible through a \$14 million Federal Government grant through the CRC Program complemented by \$50 million of cash and in-kind support from industry, research and other government partners. For more information, please visit our website www.construction-innovation.info

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