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New call-before-you-dig center opens in Greenwood with a green design, LEED certification

Indiana 811 gets underground utilities located before residents dig

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Imagine an office so awash in natural light that you don't even think about flipping the light switch.

For employees of the Indiana 811 call center in Greenwood, that's a reality.

The new 18,000-square-foot facility, which also serves as the organization's administrative headquarters, opened Saturday at 1433 Holey Moley Way -- named after the Indiana 811 mascot -- in the Sierra Business Center just east of Emerson Avenue.

From the natural lighting to an aggressive recycling program, the call center -- which offers advice on safe-digging practices -- is designed to achieve LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, which is a national benchmark for an environmentally friendly facility.

So why go green?

"It's good for the planet," said Chuck Muller, director of member and public relations for Indiana 811, which expects to field 4,000 calls each day.

Officials are seeking baseline certification -- the lowest of four levels in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

"From a purely sales perspective, there's a lot of good PR and marketing that comes from it," said Robert J. Harmeyer, architect for Indianapolis-based MSKTD & Associates, which designed the building.

"The ultimate goal is to do something that's good for the people that are working in the building and is good for the environment."

Indiana 811 is made up of 890 owners of underground facilities who want to educate residents about and prevent damage to underground utilities, such as electric and gas lines and 911 circuits. State law requires anyone who owns underground facilities to be a member of Indiana 811.

Homeowners and excavators are urged to call the service -- simply by dialing 8-1-1 -- two working days before digging. Indiana 811 notifies underground facility operators to investigate underground lines on the project site. The underground facilities are then marked with flags or paint.

The opening of the building coincided with Indiana Safe Digging Month in April, which also is a popular time for homeowners to get out in their yards -- and dig.

"If you call us, which is a free service, we'll go out and mark (underground utilities), and you'll be aware of what to look for so you don't hit them," Muller said.

Environmentally conscious features abound in the \$4.2 million facility.

About 65 workstations were built using medium-density fiberboard, which is made of scraps left over from the sawmill process and is formaldehyde-free. The glue used in the recycled carpet is odor-free, "so it lowers those volatile organic compounds that are in the air," Harmeyer said.

Then there's the natural light.

"If somebody walks in the room (during the day), they don't have to turn the light on," said Adam N. Chester, also with MSKTD. "They can walk in the room and see what they need to see. That's the whole idea -- to cut down on usage."

Offices and areas of the building have thermostats to better control the heating and air conditioning.

The project's contractor, Hagerman Construction, sorted through construction waste to recycle material.

Two underground concrete bins capture water runoff, which is purified before reaching local waterways.

Going green is a growing trend in Indiana, Harmeyer said, and it doesn't necessarily add to a building's cost.

"Typically it's the same price," he said.

"The cost difference between this building and a building that didn't go through the (LEED) process is simply the time involved in submitting the paperwork. The cost of the material and labor and construction of this building is really no more than a standard building."