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Article by Melanie Gosling

Green building practices encouraged at eco-seminar

THE South African building industry will be able to "go green" in a big way after yesterday's launch of an organisation that will provide the industry with access to green building designs, practices and materials.

Called Ecospecifier, the organisation is part of an international group founded in Australia, and launched in the city yesterday at the Green City Seminar. Delegates to the seminar heard that South Africa was lagging behind global markets in adopting green building standards and practices, and that the country ran the risk of getting left behind in creating environmentally-sustainable cities.

Lizette Swanevelder, who heads Ecospecifier, said the move towards green building internationally had given rise to the issue of buildings being punted as being environmentally friendly when they were not. Swanevelder said this was partly because many in the industry did not know where to get hold of green building materials and designs, nor whether the claims manufacturers made were true.

Ecospecifier, which will be run as a business under licence from the founding organisation in Australia, hopes to fill that gap. Users will subscribe to Ecospecifier online.

Swanevelder said, "Anyone can use it, from architects and builders to homeowners ... Manufacturers can also use Ecospecifier if they want their products to be verified and assessed. It's a tool for the whole industry."

Jacques du Toit, head of the city council's sustainable livelihoods and greening programmes, said the city's guidelines needed to be specific to the different sectors of residential, commercial and industrial buildings. The city also needed to look at converting the green building guidelines into bylaws and incentives, he said.