

The big bad wolf won't blow this house down

Picacho Mountain constructs homes with energy-efficient ICF block walls

BOB POFAHL

*Build Green,
Build Better*



I remember reading a story to my children years ago about a big bad wolf and how a brick house kept him from enjoying three little pigs for dinner. That brick house might have kept the pigs safe, but it won't keep them warm in the winter.

For generations, U.S. builders have primarily used three materials to build homes: sticks, bricks and concrete block. Technological advances and an increased focus on green building have driven many builders and homeowners to search for a better way to build homes. One of the great technologies receiving increased attention is insulating concrete forms (ICF).

ICF is a relatively new building material that provides the long-lasting, durable strength of concrete. ICF is also more energy efficient, easier to use and more affordable than many other green building materials. Those are just a few of the reasons local home builder David Coyle is working with ICF on a new Build Green New Mexico-certified custom home at Picacho Mountain.

According to Coyle, ICF's high insulation value was the first thing that appealed to him as a builder. However, there are many other benefits to using ICF. ICF provides structural strength, earthquake integrity, excellent thermal performance, four-hour fire rating, great sound insulation and is free of inert gasses (VOC free). Plus, ICF is highly resistant to fire, wind, mildew, black mold, termites and other pests.

"What most impresses me about ICF compared to other building products is

the energy efficiency it adds to a home," Coyle said. "I also like that it is a sound-proof wall system, strong and long-lasting, in addition to being pretty much mold proof."

There are many companies who produce ICF in the United States. Coyle is building this home using ICF products from Perform Wall in El Paso. ICF construction offers a simple building process and a wide range of design options. With Perform Wall ICF, curved walls, arches, nooks and virtually any architectural design imagined can be created.

Another benefit of Perform Wall ICF is that the panels are lightweight and comprised largely of recycled polystyrene.

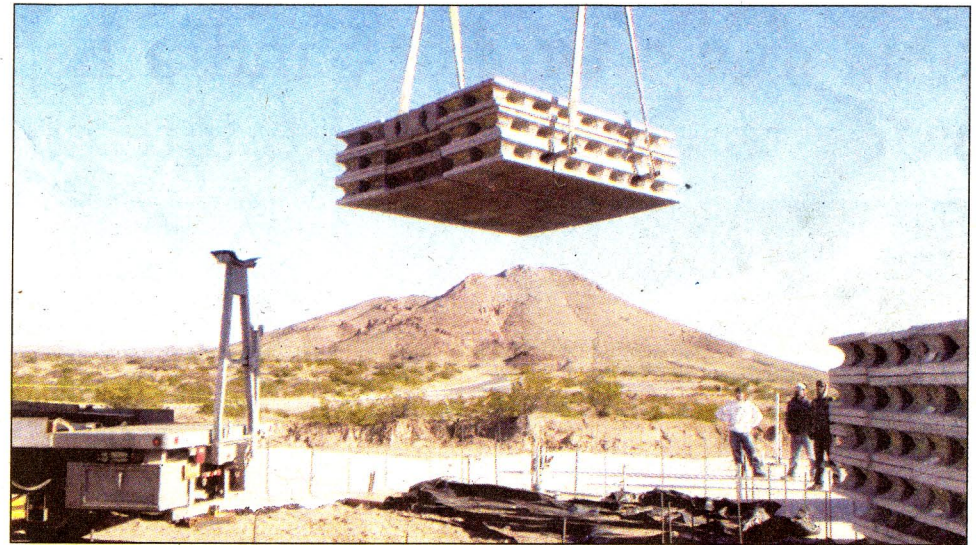
"From what I have seen, I really like the Perform Wall ICF product because it is 85 percent recycled polystyrene and 15 percent cement compound," Coyle said. "Not only is it recycled, but it seems very strong and has a great feel to it versus a just a product with only Styrofoam product."

Coyle is working with ICF installer Robert West on the construction of this home. Since 1995, West has been involved in the installation of ICF on more than 200 homes.

According to West, the upfront cost of building with Perform Wall ICF is about 10 to 15 percent more than traditional construction. However, most customers recover that cost within three years on savings from utilities and fire insurance.

Coyle recently became a certified green contractor through the National Association of Home Builders. Additionally, Coyle is considering construction of his personal home with Perform Wall.

The use of the ICF isn't the only thing that makes this Coyle home green. Coyle's commitment to green building is also evident in the site itself. Special attention has been paid to site preparation to



Insulating concrete forms provide durability and energy efficiency to local homes and can be seen throughout Picacho Mountain.

ensure a minimum amount of natural vegetation is disturbed. Coyle is also composting materials used on the job site to reduce waste.

In addition to ICF, the home will include tankless hot water heaters, spray foam insulation, low-E windows and doors, solar PV, high-efficiency heating and cooling, Energy Star appliances, low-flow water fixtures and low VOC paints, stains and flooring. Picacho Mountain is the only certified green subdivision in the region, which also helps to qualify this home for Build Green New Mexico green certification.

While we might not have to worry about the big bad wolf, there are definitely many forces of nature we must protect our homes from in the Southwest. Whether it is wind, rain, pests, heat, cold or fire, ICF will help protect your next home from the elements.

For more information about ICF, visit www.performwall.com or go to the ICF Association's website, www.forms.org. You can drive by and see this certified green



Builder David Coyle is currently constructing a Build Green New Mexico certified home with the green material.

Coyle home under construction in Picacho Mountain.

Bob Pofahl is the owner and developer of Picacho Mountain, southern New Mexico's only Build Green New Mexico certified community. For more information about green building, contact Bob at 523-2500 or visit his blog at www.picachomountain.wordpress.com.