



## **STUDENTS ON GREEN ROOFS**



Spring ramble, 2006

Hello hello!

Isn't spring such an optimistic time? Not only because the days are getting longer, but also because of the exciting developments of late. Malcolm Gladwell's 2001 bestseller, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, sets the tone of this newsletter, and current events on greenroof progress supply the optimism.

In case you haven't read it yet, *The Tipping Point* examines social epidemics, or how ideas, behaviour, messages and products sometimes behave like outbreaks of infectious disease. Moving away from the epidemiological meaning, the tipping point represents the point at which the line on a graph starts shooting straight upwards. It's the critical mass, the boiling point, at which small ideas become epidemic and, eventually, the norm.

In our case of interest, the gradual awakening of common sense may be enough to tip greenroofs into contemporary application. For example, ever more American companies are following German suit by including greenroofs on their buildings, which could change the appearance of the commercial/ industrial landscape forever. In 2003, Ford included a green roof in the renovation of its legendary Rouge centre, and this summer the world's largest retailer, Wal-Mart, will open its first U.S. store with a green roof, in a western suburb of Chicago.

Hurrah hurrah!! But hey... isn't it about time?! In 2001, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. settled with the U.S. EPA for its many violations (at 17 locations) to the Clean Water Act, all of them due to construction impacts on nearby streams and watersheds. The settlement included a hefty fine as well as a financial commitment to develop environmental management plans focusing on storm water management. Enter greenroofs, naturally!

Green roofs are entering more and more municipal policy plans, too. In the early months of 2006, the City of Toronto approved a green roof strategy, which commits to the installation of green roofs on new and existing City buildings. A North American survey from 2005 estimated that 15 local governments are engaged in establishing policies specific to green roof investment, and that another 62 local, state and federal governments are implementing the USGBC's LEED™ green building standard, which provides further support for green roof investment (15 possible points, hello!).

Still, these are only first steps. Little things can make a big difference, and the tipping point can tip the other way as well. When low bids compromise quality, for instance, poor standards will create a haze of distrust around greenroofs, and could bring the entire market crashing down before its full potential is realized. As R. Buckminster Fuller once stated, "If humanity does not opt for integrity we are through completely." On a smaller scale, this assertion applies to all emerging green roof markets.

Moving to the scale of the Student Forum, each of us can influence the tipping point by ensuring integrity of information through our studies, research and how we share our information. As you know, Greenroofs.com is attempting to compile a comprehensive body of Global Greenroof Projects. Since this is a time-consuming undertaking, we are currently exploring ways to get students involved with the growing Database, especially in compiling and verifying greenroof projects from all over the world. Interested?

If you have any thoughts with regards to these ramblings, please drop me a line! For sustained optimism, take a look at some of the references and links below.

All the best, happy spring, see you soon?

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### References

N.B. The "NewsLinks" page on [greenroofs.com](http://greenroofs.com) offers updated news pertaining to green roofs. It's a great way to stay on top of things without having to do the searching yourself!

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