Thomas Rudkowski and Bram Voerman

How Hemink and Pronex make circularity concrete

At Hemink Groep and its sister company Pronex Advies, sustainability and circularity are not just discussed in meetings, they are actually put into practice. Thomas Rudkowski, environmental and energy performance advisor at Pronex, and Bram Voerman, sustainability project developer (now sustainability and quality advisor) at Hemink, explain how they and their teams work together on future-proof property maintenance.

Within Pronex, Thomas is responsible for energy scenarios, advice and environmental impact calculations, both within and outside Hemink. “We now have a team of four people and we’re still growing,” he says. As a sustainability project developer, Bram was involved in developing and elaborating sustainability plans, tenders and bids for both housing corporations and commercial parties. “Each year, we make around 1,500 homes more sustainable and also carry out maintenance such as painting and improving bathrooms, kitchens, and toilets. Through Hemink Milieutechniek, we remediate asbestos and through Brandex (part of Hemink Groep), we make properties fire-safe. Ideally, we make homes more sustainable in an integrated way. Hemink is the all-round (one-stop-shop) property partner.”

Circularity and sustainability are important themes within the organization. “We try to include them in all our projects,” Bram explains. “We’ve now been connected to BCI Gebouw for the second year and use that tool to create scenarios. But it’s not always easy. Data isn’t always available, especially for smaller entrepreneurs who don’t have access to LCA data. That’s why we combine data with common sense. In our project development, we always work out an alternative scenario with biobased and circular materials. This way, we clearly present the choices to our clients.”

BCI Gebouw plays an important role in this, not only as a calculation tool but also as a data source. “We use it to compare scenarios, even if we don’t make a full calculation,” says Thomas. “Quantitative substantiation is often more powerful than just qualitative arguments. Especially for investors, who really focus on CO_2 reduction. They ask us to demonstrate that a sustainability measure delivers at least a 50% CO_2 reduction. Then we have to be able to substantiate that with data.”

Often, the familiar and therefore traditional solution is still chosen. When the price is attractive, price is often the deciding factor. “You can explain that something is more sustainable and environmentally conscious, but in the end the familiar and traditional alternative is often chosen,” Bram notes. “And that’s despite the fact that the Netherlands has a lot of data and tools. BCI Gebouw is fairly comprehensive in that regard, but the landscape is fragmented.”

Attention to CO_2 impact resulting from energy use and materialization is clearly noticeable, according to both men. “More and more corporations are signing the Commitment to Use Biobased Building

Materials (CTBB). Hemink Groep has also signed the commitment statement," says Bram. "We are partners to many housing corporations and help them turn ambitions into concrete actions. Not just one pilot home, but real numbers. We are part of the frontrunners group of Building Balance and strive to apply as many biobased (insulation) materials as possible. This aligns with the National Approach to Biobased Building (NABB), which states that by 2030, at least 30% of insulation for the sustainability of existing real estate must be biobased. For biobased post-insulation of roofs, we are even working towards 100% biobased by 2030, in line with the CTBB. We actively monitor this progress."

The biggest challenge, according to them, lies not only in costs but also in execution. "It requires a different way of thinking," says Thomas. "You have to convince clients that it's no longer a choice, but a given. Internally, we also offer sustainable alternatives unsolicited. Some insulation materials we simply no longer use. And yes, sometimes it's more expensive, but there are other benefits that are harder to quantify, such as CO_2 impact, experience or comfort."

To truly rely on data, Thomas and Bram believe a strong push from legislation and regulations is needed. "That would really make a difference," Thomas states. "If it becomes mandatory, more parties will move along. Now, it often remains just good intentions. Legislation could cause 60% of the movement; the other 40% comes from intrinsic motivation."