



The technology of recovery: White roofs reflect a cooler future

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With apologies to T. S. Eliot, this is the way the recession ends, this is the way the recession ends, this is the way the recession ends . . . not with a bang, but a whimper.

On Wednesday, *The New York Times*) published a story on "[white roofs](#)," an energy-saving technique that uses light colors to reduce home cooling costs and scale back climate change. Basically, the process involves painting or otherwise covering dark-colored roofs in order to reflect light and heat back into space. By cutting down on the amount of heat that a building absorbs, white roofs also reduce the amount of money that it costs to cool structures, and can help cut the ambient heat surrounding them.



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All other roof construction factors being equal, a white roof makes a great deal of energy sense, at least if you live in the Sun Belt: studies show that white roofs reduce air-conditioning costs by 20 percent or more in hot, sunny weather, and the lower energy consumption means fewer carbon dioxide emissions are fed into the atmosphere.

What's more, the cost recovery is relatively short: a white roof can cost just 15 percent more than a dark roof, depending on the materials used. California, Florida, and Georgia have adopted building codes that encourage white-roof installations, *The Times* reported, and more than 75 percent of Wal-Mart's 4,268 stores have white roofs. State energy offices and local utilities often offer financing for cool roofs, and they can qualify for tax credits if the roofing materials meet the Environmental Protection Agency's [Energy Star Program](#) requirements.

On one level, the white roof movement is a minor shift in a relatively minor economic sector; on a larger scale, however, it may have a massive influence on GDP and job creation. To begin with, given the millions of residential and commercial buildings in the U.S., a massive white roof push could help move the GDP needle. Beyond this, the reduction in energy demand and climate change that would result from a 10 percent drop in energy needs for air conditioning could provide a massive bonus to families and businesses.

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On a larger scale, white roofs show how it doesn't take a gargantuan amount of money for technology to increase energy efficiency and reduce climate change. Moreover, as an example of the resiliency/adaptability of the free American economy, they offer a serious rebuttal to naysayers who question the country's long-term prospects. After all, if the McMansion and housing overbuild era is over, then white roof job replacement could help pick up much of the slack. Additionally, with many companies and homes adding solar panels on top of those white roofs, green building employment sector should experience even more expansion.

The above may not seem like a job boom, but ultimately, that's how the recession will end: through the incremental creation of jobs in new sectors of growth. The American economy's greatest strength lies in its remarkable ability to adapt, innovate, and renew itself, creating new sectors of growth to make up for the industrial output and jobs lost to globalization.