san approach to these issues earlier, the issue has become "political" for some. Finally, for many, there is a perception that "green" either costs more, is impractical, looks "odd," or inhibits freedom of expression.

The Present Situation

Despite these many real and perceived obstacles, there is reason to be hopeful. There is a growing list of resources and examples from which to learn. While the industry has a long way to go before all building will truly be sustainable, there have been many successes. Many material manufacturers are researching and redesigning their products. With a little research, you will find that for nearly every building product there are many environmentally superior options to choose from. More owners, suppliers, and contractors are becoming sensitive to the issue and trying to improve their own performance. Enough "green" buildings have been built for us to know that they need not cost more and may frequently cost less. Finally, some of the best designs and designers of recent years have embraced these issues in innovative and imaginative ways, giving young design professionals worthy examples to learn from.

Many of the issues that were considered environmental options just a few years ago–clean air, clear water, limited energy conservation–are today required, have widespread support, and are standard practice. Many of the environmental issues that we face today will be addressed by "standard practice" for the interior design industry in a very short time. Part of this change will happen because society has no other choice–it will be required. There is only a limited amount of water available in central and west Texas, for example, and controls become tighter every year. Part of this will come about because of public consensus that will demand healthy buildings. The nearly total ban on smoking within buildings, for example, has been followed by other expectations of the basic health requirements of building on the part of the general public. Part of the initiative will come from clients who see the benefits or want to reduce risk. The large number of "sick" buildings of the late 1980s received wide attention by major building owners.

A large part of the change, however, will come about simply because it makes more sense in all of these aspects–the health of the occupants, economy, and flexibility for all concerned. Why would we continue to produce buildings that are unhealthy and inefficient when we know they do not have to be?

FIGURE 16-2
Many options for ceiling tiles are now available with high post-consumer recycled content, for either cellulose composition or mineral composition tiles.

Building Codes

The building codes that govern the design and construction of buildings are a product of the late nineteenth century. They came about because of many problems that came with the Industrial Revolution. When society began to deal with the fires, building collapses, and other problems associated with industrialization, there was a long period of trial and error as problems were discovered and solutions tried. The trial-and-error method of defining issues of fire safety and structural integrity continued for nearly a hundred years. We live and practice today with the greatly expanded and refined product of those early efforts. These various standards are widely understood and accepted, and are clearly part of "common practice." Sustainable design/environmental issues are, more or less, where building and life safety codes were in the early part of the nineteenth century. We are just beginning to understand the basic issues and just beginning to explore the solutions.