

Making Sense of Green Building Programs

By Arlene Zavocki Stewart

LEED, GBI, FGBC, ENERGY STAR, oh my! Confusion abounds as “green” building is expected to exceed \$12 billion in 2007, according to McGraw-Hill Construction Analytics. Here’s a brief primer on who’s who to get you familiar with this growing trend. As with any pop culture term, “green” can mean any number of things. True ‘green’ programs cover a cross section of topics. Almost all ‘green’ programs cover energy, water, indoor air quality, materials and site management in some permutation. Other topics vary depending on interest. The creating organization awards points or credits in each subject area depending on a measure’s ability to: use the greatest percentage of an allocated amount (efficiency); use as little as possible (conservation); reduce an impact (minimization); or make the most of what you have (maximization). The value of any particular measure varies with the importance it has to the organization or rating system. There are usually levels denoting how ‘green’ you are. Be warned – if you are thinking about undertaking a project, use the current one to assess, but do not think you will actually be able to certify it. Certification spans from planning to design to construction to commissioning for both commercial and residential sectors.

The US Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design system has generated the most press. LEED is synonymous with new commercial construction and is the iteration that is referred to most frequently when people say simply LEED (note it’s not plural – no “S”). Other LEED programs include EB (existing building), CI (commercial interiors) and CS (core and shell) with H (homes) and ND (neighbor development) under development. Some sort of LEED-certification is required in 55 cities and 22 states. Florida is poised to join them, as at press time, a bill was in the governor’s office to require all new public buildings to be LEED-certified.

(www.usgbc.org)

FHBA was successful in adding an alternative ‘green’ program to the legislation. Green Globes is found not only in the US but in Canada and the UK as well. Administered by the Green Building Initiative, their program for homes is based on NAHB’s efforts and is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Their commercial program was originally developed for Canada and is a member of the BREEAM/Green Leaf suite of environmental assessment tools. (www.thegbi.org, www.greenglobes.com, www.breeam.org)

Florida has its own homegrown green building system. Back in the late 1990s, the Florida Green Building Coalition adapted NAHB’s very first try at a green building rating system, adapted to Florida’s needs, including an extensive section on disaster mitigation. In 2006, FHBA signed an agreement with FGBC to propagate the FGBC system for homes, though the organization also has systems for commercial buildings, developments, high rise apartments and local governments.

(www.floridagreenbuilding.org)

Speaking of NAHB, they are undergoing a major revision of their green building standard in hope of obtaining ASNI certification as well.

(<http://www.nahbrc.org/technical/standards/greenbuilding.aspx>)

The new kid on the system block is Proposed Standard 189 from the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) in conjunction with the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA) and the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). Chairman John Hogan notes that “the standard is not a building rating system but rather a compilation of criteria that must be met in order for local building code officials to provide a Certificate of Occupancy for a facility.” This standard is in final stages of approval, though the comment period will be over by the publication of this article. (www.ashrae.org)

Because it is so new and hip, many programs that only focus on one subject area will tap into the ‘green’ buzz. While limited in scope, these programs can offer niche opportunities, especially where a particular issue is particularly grave or well supported. The best known example is ENERGY STAR, a federal program that gives brand recognition over thirty products are covered. This program focuses on energy efficiency and its side effect, air quality and emissions, with a little bit of water conservation thrown in depending on the product. For homes, ENERGY STAR requires evaluation by a Florida-certified energy rater, which can be difficult as there are only about 120 in the state and most are with utilities. Last summer, ENERGY STAR implemented its first update in eight years. Now, it’s almost impossible to obtain this popular label solely on product choices or with only testing at CO. (www.energystar.gov)

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