

## Building Benefits

### LEED System Undergoes Revisions

By **Bill Barnard, AIA, LEED-AP®**

**S**ustainable built environments have become a popular direction in building design. The reasons for being sustainable or “green” are worth consideration for every business in Indiana and throughout the country.

Changes in the U.S. Green Building Council’s (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System are designed to improve balance and usability, as well as make it more regionally applicable.

#### Why green?

Helping to minimize global warming and save the earth is a worthwhile effort. But you also lower your energy, water and waste costs. Green improvements usually pay for themselves within three years, with an annual return on investment of 25% to 40%, according to the study, *The Costs and Financial Benefits of Green Buildings: A Report to California’s Sustainable Building Task Force*. Thus, “green” helps sustain your bottom line.

Sustainable design also impacts employee morale and productivity. William Pape, co-founder of VeriFone, reported in *Inc.* magazine that 18 months after retrofitting the company’s building to reduce indoor pollutants and improve environmental quality, absenteeism dropped 40% and productivity rose more than 5%. In the article, Pape said that healthy workplaces have “done more to boost productivity than all the bandwidth in the world.”

The best part? “...There is no significant difference in average costs for green buildings as compared to non-green buildings,” according to *Cost of Green Revisited: Reexamining the Feasibility and Cost Impact of Sustainable Design in the Light of Increased Market Adoption*, a 2007 report. We have examples in Indiana and across the country that prove this point and are helping owners save money every day.

#### Benefits to LEED certification

According to the USGBC, LEED-certified projects blend environmental, economic and occupant-oriented performance. Statistics have shown that the impacts of green building on productivity are tremendous. LEED-certified buildings:

- provide a healthier and safer environment for occupants;
- lower operating costs and increase asset value;
- conserve water and energy; and
- improve student test performances by 20% and productivity by 16%.

From a business standpoint, LEED-certified buildings can also demonstrate an owner’s commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

#### LEED 2009 updates

LEED 2009, in essence, entails three advancements to the existing rating system: harmonization, credit weightings and

regionalization.

• **Harmonization.** The previous version of the LEED rating systems consisted of different credits (to cover the same topic) being applied to different building types. LEED 2009 allows credits to be applied to the different rating systems, making them more consistent. According to the USGBC, “each credit now tells the whole story of how a given credit concept can be applied to different building types and different phases of a building’s life cycle.”

• **Credit Weightings.** With this revision, more points or credit will be awarded to a building that has a greater impact on and benefit to the environment. As a result, LEED 2009 will operate on a 100-point scale. There are four levels of certification – certified (40-49 points), silver (50-59), gold (60-79) and platinum (80 or more) – for a green building.

• **Regionalization.** While this does not create new credits for different regions, it does allow teams to earn bonus credits for regionally important green building strategies. One example would be that a facility in a dry, arid climate with less water resources would get extra points to save water. The innovative design and regional credits allows a project to earn “extra credit” points (a maximum of 10) beyond the 100-point scale.



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#### End result

LEED measures how the design and construction of any project measures up to other sustainable projects. It is the “Olympics for green buildings.” Whether or not you use LEED, business owners should try to make their buildings as sustainable as possible.

Be certain to select a design, construction and operations team with the experience and ability to help keep upfront costs down. Your team should show the true paybacks of sustainability to help you make informed decisions for your new construction, maintenance or renovation project. This will allow each business to bolster its bottom line while doing so in a healthier workplace and protecting our nation’s resources.

#### INFORMATION LINK

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