

Not easy, but being green is the hottest, trendiest

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It's not easy being green—or so the song goes. That being said, with the new administration in Washington, going green is not only “hip”, but there may be some tax advantage or grants to entice you to go green. One application of the green concept is a green building.

A green building is designed from the start to save energy. What makes it a green building is the certification given to it by the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), which is a voluntary building rating system and the national standard for developing green and sustainable buildings. This system was created in 1998 by the US Green Building Council and went nationwide in 2000.



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The LEED rating system is a certification program and a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and maintenance of an energy efficient building. It relies on independent third-party verification that a building project is both environmentally responsible and a healthy place to work. As there are many types of credit categories applicable to a specific design situation, the system has flexibility for a building, architect or designer to design and build a building that is in a particular locale.

There are four certification levels, based upon a point system, with certified at the lowest and platinum the highest level. The points are based upon credits in various categories, which are added up to determine the certification level. There are six categories used by LEED to rate a building and each category has a different number of points allotted to it.

The first category concerns the sustainability of the site. This category encourages the reuse of existing buildings and site, the protection of the land being used for the site and the reduction of any adverse environmental impact of the new development. There is a prerequisite for this category which is to incorporate an erosion plan as part of the site development. Some of the attributes for which points are given for this category might include secure bicycle racks (along with shower and changing facilities), preferred parking spaces for fuel efficient vehicles, preferred parking for carpools, using light poles and fixtures to reduce the light pollution.

Another category is that of water efficiency. This is aimed to reduce water use and the use of waste water salvage technologies. In a practical sense, it may include using landscaping that does not

require irrigation, reducing the use of water in the plumbing system using waterless urinals and low water use toilets or if it is a large enough site, treating the wastewater on site.

The next category is energy and atmosphere. The particular site might use an alternate source of power for the HVAC and electrical systems and enhance the use of such systems. The building might also use an enhanced refrigerant management system for the air conditioning system of the project. This is the area for the on-site renewable energy technology and the use of green power.

The fourth category gives points for the materials and resources that make up the building. The prerequisite for this category is that each building must have a storage area to collect recycling materials for the building's occupant. Points are given for reuse of materials salvaged from another building, using recycled steel, concrete, drywall or glass or using local materials.

The next category supports the indoor environmental quality. The points in this area are given for designating the building as nonsmoking, use of low-emitting adhesives, sealants or paints, installing a CO2 monitoring system and increasing the ventilation levels in the building. Having operable windows in the building is a plus. Designing the building window systems to maximize the penetration of daylight into the interior spaces of the building is also a plus.

The last category is that of innovation and the design process. This may involve using organic housekeeping products, using organics in landscape management, using a LEED accredited professional manager for the project.

While the examples listed above are not an exhaustive list, the reader can get the general idea about the many different ways to have a building designed to be green. Having your corporate building as a certified LEED building is a great start to your corporate sustainability program. The consumers who buy products from your company appreciate your corporate responsibility in protecting the environment. Your company may also benefit by way of lower energy cost, lower water usage and happier employees, not to mention the possible tax benefits and grants.

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