



Green living

What is LEED certification?

By Jenny Ivy | April 10, 2017

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Our buildings and homes—the places we eat, sleep, shop, work and worship—are responsible for an enormous amount of global energy use, resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. In the U.S. alone, buildings account for almost 40 percent of national carbon dioxide emissions, according to the U.S. General Services Administration.

For almost 20 years, the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) **Green Building Program**, under the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), has provided a framework for eco-friendly design and construction around the world. When a building—either new or existing—obtains a LEED certification, it is meeting standards that ensure less energy consumption, lower carbon emissions and healthier environments. LEED-certified buildings have 34 percent lower carbon-dioxide emissions, consume 25 percent less energy and 11 percent less water, according to the USGBC.

What’s involved in LEED certification?

Everything from paint to water pressure is scrutinized for LEED certification. Low Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) paints, for example, are required as they reduce harmful chemicals and impact a building’s indoor air quality. While they may have been difficult to obtain in 2001, when the certification program was just taking shape, manufacturers have significantly increased the low-VOC paint supply in response to growing demand.

Other performance measurements include:

- Water use
- Rate of occupant use of transit/alternative commuting
- Percentage of waste recycled
- Fresh air delivery
- Mandatory policies that require green operational practices, including green cleaning and sustainable site management.

Obtaining LEED certification is a timely and costly process, involving third-party reviews and ever-changing standards. But it has grown to become the world’s most widely used green building rating system, with almost 80,000 projects participating across 162 countries.

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How to know if a business is green

We all have our favorite natural products that we reach for day after day. But how are we, as consumers, to know what our favorite brands and stores are up to behind the scenes, and if they’re walking the walk, rather than just talking the talk about sustainability?

For the conscious consumer, the USGBC offers five cues to look for:

- **B-Corp certification:** The benefit corporation or B-Corp, is a for-profit entity that is formally committed to supporting charitable causes or engaging in socially responsible business practices. These entities are certified by the non-profit B Lab and are widely recognized as leading the way in the fields of CSR and sustainable business. Look for a B-Corp designation on the websites of your favorite companies or visit the **B Lab website** to browse a full listing of B-Corp Certified businesses.
- **Dedicated CSR web pages:** Visit the homepage of any one of your favorite brands and look for links labeled “Corporate Responsibility” or “Sustainability.” If a business is taking action to better the world around them, they will likely share what they’re doing without reservation.
- **Supply chain transparency:** Not every company is capable of providing current data on the health and responsibility of their supply chain, but those that are making a real effort to ensure their sourcing is environmentally friendly, not to mention free of human rights abuses, often publish information on their websites. If it’s important to you that your purchases reflect your values, seek out brands that are open about their sourcing, from top to bottom.
- **Chief sustainability officers:** Even a decade ago, the titles of chief sustainability officer or vice president of sustainability were not commonplace. Nowadays, any company worth their sustainability salt has at least one staff member, if not an entire department, dedicated to making sure their day-to-day business operations are taking conscious, sustainable actions.
- **LEED certification:** Nearly 8,000 retailers worldwide participate in LEED and more than 1.2 million consumers experience a LEED-certified retail space every day. To learn more about companies using LEED, download the **LEED in Motion: Retail report** or visit the LEED project directory on **usgbc.org**.

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