

The Growth of Green in Construction

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The marketplace is full of trends and ideas that inundate where we work and live. The construction industry is not immune from these trends and, as many contractors have already discovered, the need to jump aboard the most recent trend could mean the difference between success and failure.

Green construction is of course the most recent movement to hit builders. We hear a lot about “green buildings” and “going green” but what does “green” really consist of? It shouldn’t be surprising there are numerous definitions of green with no single accepted definition. Here are just a few:

“An organized effort to design and build buildings using a process and materials which promote environmental sustainability” (BOLD Builders, 2009).

“Green architecture, or green design, is an approach to building that minimizes harmful effects on human health and the environment” (Jackie Craven, Architect Journalist, 2009).

“Green building is the practice of creating structures and using processes that are environmentally responsible and resource-efficient throughout a building's life-cycle from siting to design, construction, operation, maintenance, renovation and deconstruction. This practice expands and complements the classical building design concerns of economy, utility, durability, and comfort. Green building is also known as a sustainable or high performance building” (www.epa.gov, 2009).

“Increasing the efficiency with which buildings and their sites use energy, water and materials, and reducing building impacts on human health and the environment, through better siting, design, construction, operation, maintenance, and removal – the complete building cycle” (Building Design & Construction: White Paper on Sustainability, Nov. 2003).

Why is it important for you to build green?

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, buildings use 39 percent of the total energy, 12 percent of the total water consumption, 68 percent of total electricity, and 38 percent of carbon dioxide emissions. See

http://www.thediypal.com/index.php?title=Definition_of_Green_Building These numbers demonstrate the direct impact the construction industry has on the environment and your community.

In addition to the environment, there are economic benefits for your company by building “green”. These include optimizing performance, reduction of operating costs, and improved occupant productivity.

Additionally, the marketplace for green building is expected to grow from \$7.4 billion in 2005 to between \$19 and \$38 billion by 2010. See Anderson, Brian D.; Legal and Business Issues of

Green Building, 79 Aug Wis. Law. 10 (Aug. 2006). “Going green” as a contractor is no longer a necessity, but a must.

Just as there is no single accepted definition of “green” there is not one standard used to determine what constitutes “green” construction. One widely used standard is the Leadership and Energy in Environmental Design (LEED). LEED is an internationally recognized building certification program, developed by the United States Green Building Council.

LEED is a rating system which offers points for your project based on the impact to the community, the impact of health for those who work or live in the building, and the profitability in relation to conventional counterparts. Points are given based on criteria established to judge design, construction, operations and management of the building. A building that earns 26 points can become LEED-certified. 100 base-points are possible.

Educational programs as well as more information on the LEED certification are available at www.usgbc.org.

Liability

Going “green” does not come without its downfalls. With an increase in “green” growth, there will undoubtedly be an increase in “green” litigation. It will be important for you to work closely with your design and construction team to ensure the correct materials and specifications are used to deliver your “green” building. Additionally protection may be afforded through risk management practices such as insurance. Some insurance companies are drafting policies to provide specific coverage for “green” construction. You will want to ensure you have the knowledge, education, and protection before declaring your project “green.”

The “green” trend isn’t going away. The push for environmentally-safe policies and procedures continues to increase. Now is your opportunity to ensure your business is contributing to the environment in addition to reaping the economic and social benefits of building “green”.

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