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## FOCUS

This  
Month

Green Building Trends



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### When it comes to green building, experience counts

It was not long ago that green, environmentally friendly building processes were considered an expensive fad, a risky trend with questionable long-term viability. How wrong those naysayers were.

Today it is common – in fact, virtually a given – to find sustainable design components in commercial construction project requirements, as businesses look for energy efficiency and cities seek to reduce the environmental impact of rapid population growth.

The commercial LEED/green construction market is expected to reach upward of \$20 billion over the next five years. Savvy contractors who are up to speed on green products and installation can help building owners reduce construction and maintenance costs while contributing critical points needed to secure LEED certification.

#### What is LEED/green building?

Green building is the practice of constructing efficient, healthy, sustainable buildings, while at the same time attempting to reduce any harmful effects on the environment.

The U.S. Green Building Council developed its LEED or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program as a means to certify commercial green building projects, using a rigorous set of standards. Certification is offered in several categories, the most popular of which is

LEED for New Construction and Major Renovations (LEED-NC). Another popular category is LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI) for tenant improvement projects. To achieve LEED platinum, gold, silver or certified levels, projects must achieve a requisite number of points in various categories.

While only buildings (not floors) can be LEED certified, flooring can contribute points toward earning LEED credits in three of the six LEED categories, and in a number of credit areas.

Here are ways flooring can help earn LEED points:

**Specifying green label or green label products**, such as carpet and carpet backing made primarily from recycled content.

**Using regional materials** produced within 500 miles of the project.

**Specifying natural products**, like linoleum, which is a natural wood-based product.

**Incorporating wood products** certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

**Using green-friendly installation techniques**, such as green label adhesives that emit low VOCs. Laminate and engi-

neered wood products that are installed without urea-formaldehyde also can earn points.

**Incorporating rapidly renewing products**, such as bamboo and cork, with harvesting cycles of 10 years or less.

**Recommending energy efficient solutions** like raised access flooring and underfloor HVAC systems, which reduce energy consumption.

#### Managing the costs of going green

Initial costs to build a LEED certified building can be as much as 2 percent higher than those for traditional construction. However, those costs can be recovered through faster lease-up rates, rental premiums and increased market valuation.

To control costs on LEED projects, the Natural Resources Defense Council recommends the following:

**Define your environmental target** and decide what level of LEED certification you going after.

**Set a clear and adequate budget:** Higher levels of LEED certification do require additional expenditure.

**Maintain the economic and environmental integrity** of your project at every stage.

**Engineer for optimum life cycle value** and sustainability.

**Hire LEED-knowledgeable professionals.**

When it comes to commercial flooring, materials and installation processes today are drastically different from just a few years ago, and offer an array of green options ideally suited for LEED construction. Today's green buildings may incor-

porate a variety of hard surface products, recycled-content carpet tile, access flooring, installations with glueless backing and underfloor air and modular power systems.

These complex and ever-changing green building technologies require flooring, and other contractors, with a diverse product knowledge and extensive green building experience. One of the challenges faced in green building is "greenwashing," the temptation by some manufacturers and contractors to promote themselves as green experts, whether they truly are or not.

The best way to combat greenwashing is to educate yourself. Understand what goes into green building, and into achieving LEED certification. Ask for LEED-certified project references. Research product specifications and certifications. Ask if the business has LEED-accredited professionals on staff – these are professionals who have passed a demanding curriculum and testing on all aspects of the LEED process. In the end, partnering with trusted resources that bring a demonstrated track record of LEED projects will help your LEED projects be successful.

*Founded by Bill Imhoff in 1988 in Austin, Intertech Flooring is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Intertech has been a leader in commercial LEED flooring, installing more than \$12 million in LEED projects in 2007 alone. The Austin Business Journal named Intertech the 2008 Green Business of the Year in the large business category for its extensive LEED flooring work, carpet recycling initiatives and LEED-accredited professional staff.*