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# Commentary: More voices need to be heard when setting green standards

By Craig Silvertooth, Published: July 21

It takes scientific know-how, investment and innovation to produce the energy efficient buildings that increasingly dot our nation's skylines as they advance from the design table to occupied homes, offices and facilities. Chemistry and thousands of cutting-edge products, materials and innovations play leading roles in making these high-performance buildings possible. Yet this contribution is frequently overlooked or misunderstood.

Millions of dollars are invested each year in research and development to bring to market innovative materials and products that improve energy efficiency. Reflective roofing, windows with engineered frames and glazing, air- and water-resistant building wraps, and solar solutions are a few examples of products and materials that are enabling better building energy performance. There are also less visible innovations, such as foam insulation, that studies have shown saves more than 233 times its embedded energy during its useful life span.

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Companies, governments, schools and other buildings predominately seek green certification from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system, which has established itself as the dominant green building rating system in both the private and public sectors. Since it began in 2000, LEED has certified nearly 45,000 buildings in the United States alone and many states, major cities and the federal government now require new public buildings to be LEED certified.

Despite its dominance of the green building market, concerns about LEED have led to an emerging public debate over the appropriate role of green buildings programs and how they are developed, especially given the federal government's reliance on LEED. Developed by the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council, LEED has been criticized for shutting out many stakeholders, being unbalanced in its committee representation and lacking transparency.

These shortcomings are evident in the July 2 approval of an updated version of LEED. The council did not include public disclosure of the number and nature of ballot votes against the new version of LEED. Furthermore, it did not even finish

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reviewing and responding to (not to mention resolving) the comments and objections raised by the public and impacted stakeholders.

The services, products and materials produced by the members of the American High Performance Buildings Coalition are some of the most innovative and effective available and play a large part in helping advance the green building movement. Our expertise in building science and materials make us critical stakeholders in the

development of green building ratings systems such as LEED. Yet, we are too often excluded from contributing to the process. Developing these standards through a truly open, balanced and inclusive process is the only way we can ensure delivery of the most energy efficient, resource efficient and healthy buildings capable of effectively meeting the market's needs.

Billions of our nation's tax dollars go into designing, building and upgrading our federal facilities, and these buildings are mandated to use LEED. Should a closed system such as this be allowed to enjoy what amounts to a monopoly over our federal government's mandated green building program?

If Americans' hard-earned tax dollars are to go toward implementing LEED on the federal level, the Green Building Council, or the federal government, has a responsibility to ensure consensus, meaning that all materially affected stakeholders can participate in the development of the system, and that their technical input is fully considered. This unfortunately isn't happening.

Our coalition strongly believes that congress should mandate that all federal buildings use green building ratings systems that are true, affirmed consensus standards. But, at the very least, our representatives in Washington must encourage greater choice so that agencies aren't forced to accept only one option; and they should demand that green building systems used by our federal government use risk assessment methodology and incorporate life cycle assessment; that they are technology, product and material neutral; and that they are continuously reviewed by the government. If a green building rating system can't provide these bare minimum characteristics, America's taxpayers shouldn't be footing the bill for it.

LEED has a dominating market position in both the public and private sectors. However, as it has grown in popularity, it has clearly outgrown the process used to develop and revise it. The American High Performance Buildings Coalition must be a part of improving the process if LEED is to remain credible and effective for the long term. Excluding industry experts is not a sustainable approach.

*Craig Silvertooth is president of the Center for Environmental Innovation in Roofing, a member of the American High Performance Buildings Coalition, a group representing a number of chemical and material manufacturers.*

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frostjw wrote:

7/23/2013 1:08 PM PDT

I am certain that this article was written with full intent to spin the results. LEED uses a consensus process and the only way that this wouldn't be the case is if by consensus you mean 100% approval by all member. That will never happen. A majority is the democratic way and i believe that the voting passed overwhelmingly



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in favor of approval to the tune of 80+%... which included those members from the chemical industry and even some of us who voted 'no' for similar but opposite reasons.

The notion of not resolving issues brought up by the chemical industry is a false one as well. The biggest frustration that many of us had in the MR credits of the new version was because of a 'wink/nod' to the chemical industry to allow meeting the disclosure credit by demonstrating that one is exploring supply chain efficiencies in the product. This allows manufacturers to skirt the real issue of disclosure and is the primary reason so many outside of the chemical industry were upset. But I know first hand that this was a bend to the chemical industry to get their 'approval.' What we really want is disclosure... not risk assessments, not supply chain evaluations... we need to know what is in it. Now there is an avenue for that to NOT happen.

Also, this is one credit out of 110. You can't lambaste LEED because of one credit. Projects are not required to achieve that credit to get certified and frankly, many won't until the market catches up (similar to commissioning in the first versions of LEED; which is now mandatory)... but those companies who want to lead and see the writing on the wall, will lead and capture more market share because of it. Countless AEC firms are pushing towards more transparency and this is not an issue anyone is willing to back away from. Our clients deserve to know what is in the products we are specifying.

This is the tobacco industry approach rehashed. I am sorry to say but you are blowing smoke.



**paulhwermer@att.net** wrote:

7/23/2013 2:11 PM PDT

As someone who has participated in various standards setting activities, I can think of no standards process that is more open and accessible to public comment as the USGBC-LEED standards are.

I also note that a "full consensus" standard with 100% agreement is a joke - It let's the least capable member hold all others at ransom. But then, that's what the American High Performance Buildings Coalition appears intent on doing - make sure that none of their members face a clear challenge based on to EHS/green characteristics of their products.

(Speaking as a cynical chemist with experience in SEMI standards, actively investigated ANSI, ISO and BSI options, before a management decision to follow the ISEAL protocols and, as a member of USGBC, a participant in the the standards review process)



**saucermn** wrote:

7/23/2013 1:26 PM PDT

While the opening paragraph states a noble goal, the remainder of this paid marketing piece for the chemical industry is utter hogwash.

The LEED development process is broad based and exceptionally transparent. What it does not do, however, is allow toxic or harmful chemical materials to be slipped into buildings where they may compromise consumer's health - no matter how well they may theoretically perform in terms of energy or durability..

The chemical industry wishes to bend USGBC to its own ends; failing that (which they so far have failed) they now would like to discredit the organization. Why? They believe it is a shorter path to profits than actually re-engineering their products to remove known toxins, carcinogens and other health hazards.

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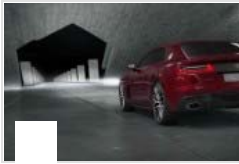
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