

[Green building: Healthy, global and growing](#)

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A number of USGBC West Michigan Chapter members recently attended Greenbuild, our national organization's annual conference, held this year in Phoenix. In addition to enjoying a break from the autumn chill, we had the chance to catch up on trends in green building. Contemplating these trends as we look ahead to 2010, several of us have contributed our thoughts:

Greening our schools

With more than 20 percent of Americans now attending school as students, faculty or staff, momentum is building to "green" our schools in 2010. However, since new construction of K-12 schools is down due to the current economy, the focus is shifting to existing school buildings.

For every newly constructed school there are approximately 27 existing schools, adding up to over 128,000 school buildings nationwide. USGBC will soon have available a LEED for Existing Schools toolkit to help administrators and other stakeholders understand the health, efficiency, energy-saving and environmental benefits of green schools.

Meanwhile, USGBC's green school advocacy efforts are underway with the federal government, simultaneous with relationship-building among national organizations including the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the National Association of School Board Members and others. Locally, our green school advocacy initiatives remain strong. We are working closely with the USGBC Detroit Regional Chapter to ensure we are bringing the same message to the entire state.

— Renae Hesselink, LEED AP
Vice President of Sustainability, Nichols

New model energy code

During Greenbuild, the USGBC and the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) presented an update on a new high performance model building code called ASHRAE/IESNA/USGBC 189.1. This code has been through several public comment periods and is currently in the final stages of editing before being released early in 2010. The objective is an incremental step toward achieving a net zero carbon building by 2030, a goal agreed to by the American Institute of Architects and the USGBC.

The new standard is being tested in simulations by the U.S. Department of Energy, and is expected to provide energy savings an average 21 percent higher than current energy codes.

International growth of the green building movement

The USGBC has become a world leader in green building because of two key differences from similar organizations:

1. We have developed sustainable design and construction best practices with the consent of our membership.
2. We are the only green building organization that requires third party validation.

A number of other countries have begun to adopt our standards. The World Green Building Council was launched to host this new marketplace with 14 fully functioning Green Building Councils, and 36 other nations are on a path toward establishing theirs.

Each country must create its own standards, as customs and codes vary so much regionally. It's essential that each region institute the efficiencies, customs, and best practices that are most effective for its climate and culture.

Water resources

Our visit to the Arizona desert reminded us that in many places, water is increasingly scarce. Touring a local wastewater treatment plant illustrated some of the water resource issues Southwesterners face. Although they've made progress in conservation measure, their sustainability footprint for water resources is based on antiquated models of water supply. The water conservation challenges Arizonans face are enormous, and revolve significantly around shifting public opinion. Today water supply is still very cheap in the desert, although costs are expected to increase significantly over the next few years.

— Samuel Pobst, Principal, LEED AP,
Eco Metrics LLC

Looking Ahead

The architects, engineers, builders, marketers, educators and others who filled the Phoenix Convention Center came to connect, to test the waters, to expand their green building IQ, and/or to pitch a product. Their presence made it clear the green building sector represents a steadily growing bright spot in today's economy.

This year's theme, "Main Street Green," placed the emphasis where it belongs, because Main Street ultimately will drive the demand for energy savings, resource conservation and a healthier, more sustainable quality of life throughout 2010 and beyond.

— Chuck Otto, Principal,
Corporate Sustainability Communications