

greening the **BOTTOM LINE**

AGC green-training expert says building green makes good dollar sense and environmental practice

By H.L. Hild



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Job Title

Director, science and technology
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Member:

General Building Contractors of New York State

How long with the company

13+ years

Education:

B.S., mechanical engineering technology, Rochester Institute of Technology

LEED AP:

2003

AGC Service:

Member of the Environmental Committee, two years
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Is green construction here to stay?

Yes. A current industry report shows the value of green building construction starts rose from \$10 billion in 2005 to between \$36 billion and \$49 billion in 2008. Another report suggests that it could reach \$180 billion by 2013.

Green has become mainstream and in some markets is now a code requirement. Plus, over time, the operating costs of green buildings are far less and generate more savings, which equals more money for taxpayers [for public buildings]. And green buildings can spur the growth of new markets for green products and clean-energy technologies.

What's the most important reason you give to owners and contractors who are not yet doing much green building that they should get on board with the green movement?

Not only is it better for the environment, it is also better for the bottom line. Green buildings cost less to maintain and operate and are worth more. Several recent studies indicate

that a sustainable building will sell for more and produce a higher rental rate.

Green buildings also have increased occupancy rates and marketability, improved productivity, employee retention and reduced absenteeism, since healthier and cleaner workplaces tend to mean healthier employees.

An obvious environmental benefit is reducing the impact of natural resources consumed. Over time, building green saves money through lower operating costs that are measurable using triple-bottom-line accounting.

What do today's contractors most need to know to perform green construction projects successfully?

Education is key. Today's contractors must have a thorough understanding of sustainable construction practices and be well-versed in green rating systems, specifically LEED.

While most people understand the environmental and social benefits, building green also has to make good business sense. Some



Steve Beck has been conducting sustainability training for AGC New York, among others.

opponents of the LEED ratings system may claim that the upfront costs of green buildings are too great, and green-building advocates say a LEED Silver rating can be achieved at no additional cost to the project.

The fact is that both statements are correct. Cost depends on the project type, the project team and the stage at which LEED is incorporated into the design and construction process, as well as



The University of Rochester's Goergen Hall, built by LeChase Construction, was the first campus building to be LEED certified.



Syracuse University's Center of Excellence is an eight-story, 55,000-sq-ft research building pursuing LEED Platinum certification. Sustainability features will include a rainwater collection system, a living roof and demand-controlled ventilation.

other factors. Depending upon the circumstances, it is feasible to build green with minimal or no upfront cost.

What kind of staff training do you recommend for contractors who are serious about boosting their firms' green capabilities?

Key staff should become LEED AP accredited, and all project management personnel should be fully versed in the contractor responsibilities on a LEED-certified or sustainable project. All onsite personnel should have a general understanding of green and sustainable construction practices.

What is the biggest obstacle that contractors face in increasing their participation in green construction?

When people really understand the benefits of sustainability, they can see that it is much more than just environmental and truly speaks to the bottom line. The information is there, but not everyone is aware of what can be done. Owners might not be asking for it because they are not fully versed on the topic. A/E firms and CM firms might not be bringing the ideas to the table because they feel an owner might not be interested, or they may be up against time and cost constraints that seem prohibitive.

We are seeing more and more people interested and making efforts, especially in the higher education and health-care markets, where it just makes sense. The more information that is easily accessible and the more success stories that are told, the more others will start adopting these ideas.

What are the top three things contractors can do to reduce their own carbon footprint?

- > The 3Rs: reduce waste, recycle and reuse.
- > Employ energy efficiencies, both on owned and leased facilities, as well as in daily operations.
- > Use sustainable products.

What was your firm's motivation for becoming involved with green construction?

LeChase has a motto of "doing the right thing," and we consider this an extension of that credo. We want to be leaders in this movement because we feel it is the right thing to do for the future of our communities as a whole. ■

Getting Greener Every Day

Steve Beck says that LeChase's initial efforts to green the company include:

- > Switching the entire company to recycled paper products.
- > Enforcing recyclable bins for cans and bottles (following state regulations).
- > Encouraging the use of ceramic coffee mugs and replacing Styrofoam cups with paper ones.
- > Implementing energy-saving initiatives: lighting alternatives, occupancy lighting sensors.
- > Creating resources and tools to quickly and accurately report the cost of implementing LEED requirements on building projects.
- > Developing a tool to look at total life-cycle costs for LEED point opportunities, not just first-cost dollars.
- > Purchasing or renting materials and equipment locally to minimize shipping-distance pollution, when it is cost effective to do so.
- > Investigating the installation of a rainwater collection tank in the yard for use in washing equipment.
- > Conducting ongoing internal training.
- > Equipping all jobsites with fuel/oil spill kits to clean up small spills from leaking equipment or broken hoses.
- > Considering changing our company fleet to alternate-powered vehicles.
- > Evaluating vendors based not only on cost but also on their commitment to green.
- > Studying the use of alternative power.
- > Developing and tracking the use of a triple-bottom-line reporting tool.