



Looking beyond LEED Certification

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Two years ago, I moved from San Francisco to New York for an amazing career opportunity: to start a sustainability program for The New York Palace hotel. Not surprisingly, when discussing my career with novices and experts alike, the most common question that I receive is whether or not the hotel is LEED Certified. Of the many green building certifications available, LEED is both the most widely recognized and the most difficult to achieve-especially in the Existing Buildings: Operations & Maintenance category. This is due in large part to the fact that buildings are required to have a minimum Energy Star score of 69 as a prerequisite to apply for certification. For most buildings this is a nearly impossible hurdle, as making the changes necessary to raise their qualifying score poses too great of a financial hardship-even with the array of grants and funding available. This is why I was disappointed (and even angry) when I learned that the USGBC is proposing to raise the prerequisite score from 69 to 75 in the coming year. While I'm certain that the intention of the USGBC is to maintain a high level of integrity, this 6 point jump makes LEED certification virtually unattainable for most companies who are, at the end of the day, trying to do the right thing.

So while LEED certification is an achievement that should be both recognized and celebrated, it's important to keep in mind that it's not the only available option. If you are looking to certify your building, hold meetings in a green space or invest in a sustainable property, remember that not all "green" buildings have that same familiar shiny plaque.

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