



## **What is green building? Not always an easy question**

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What is green building? It's a simple question that we get a lot here at U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), but not one where it's always easy to find a simple answer.

The definition of  
green building

Green building is a holistic concept that starts with the understanding that the built environment can have profound effects, both positive and negative, on the natural environment, as well as the people who inhabit buildings every day. Green building is an effort to amplify the positive and mitigate the negative of these effects throughout the entire life cycle of a building.

While there are many different definitions of green building out there, it is generally accepted as the planning, design, construction, and operations of buildings with several central, foremost considerations: energy use, water use, indoor environmental quality, material selection and the building's effects on its site.

LEED is green building

Sound familiar? It should, as these elements make up the basic parameters for the different credit categories within the LEED green building rating system. LEED acts as a framework for decision-making for project teams in all of these areas, rewarding best practices and innovation and recognizing exemplary building projects with different levels of LEED certification.

Green building existed before LEED, and even before USGBC was established in 1993. Many great green buildings ideas were being circulated and used prior to LEED's development in the mid to late '90s, but there was no central mechanism for codifying them or ensuring their effective implementation. As USGBC senior vice president of LEED Scot Horst has noted, LEED's development grew from a recognition that, "There's all these amazing things that people are doing, so let's write them down in a list, and say that if you do so many of them, that's an environmental structure."

Today, a LEED plaque is a universal mark of distinction, signifying that the building was constructed or is being operated to be healthy, high-performing and resource efficient. More than 60,000 commercial projects worldwide are participating in LEED, with 1.7 million s/f certifying every day. LEED has also spawned an entire green building industry, expected to be worth up to \$248 billion in the U.S. by 2016.

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