



New rules for LEED existing building certification saving money and going green is now easier

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There are new "green" guidelines for your existing buildings-and they can help you both save money and help the environment.

And what's more, the whole process has become simpler and easier for both building owners and managers. If you take a look at the long-awaited reference guide for the new Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB), you'll see several things that should please you.

LEED-EB is the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) green certification program for buildings that have been in operation for at least one year. The new standards, entitled LEED-EB: Operations and Management (LEED-EB: O&M), has replaced the old rating system in this category.

The previous LEED-EB prerequisites, introduced by the USGBC in 2004, were simply an adaptation from LEED for New Construction, including major renovations. By contrast, LEED-EB: O&M is more specialized and efficient. (The reference to operations and maintenance derives from the new program's greater focus on ensuring that a building's operations maintain high performance over time.)

There are fewer prerequisites in LEED-EB: O&M than in the previous version, which makes it easier for buildings to meet the requirements and qualify for certification. The prerequisites and credits for LEED-EB: O&M fall within six categories: sustainability; water efficiency; energy and atmosphere; materials and resources; indoor environmental quality; and innovation in operations. The prerequisites (mandatory building conditions), which are straightforward, include: minimum indoor plumbing fixture and fitting efficiency; energy efficiency and performance and ozone protection; sustainable purchasing and solid waste management policies; outdoor air introduction and exhaust systems; environmental tobacco smoke control; and green cleaning policy.

A building can achieve 85 possible base points in the LEED-EB: O&M rating system, and 30 of them fall into the energy efficiency category. Fuel prices are at an all-time high, so it makes sense that energy-saving operational and maintenance practices are a key component of the certification.

The new LEED-EB: O&M system provides approximately 50% more points for energy efficiency. There is a greater emphasis on ensuring that these buildings meet the Energy Star rating system (Energy Star is a government-backed program helping businesses and individuals protect the environment through superior energy efficiency). Under the new standards, 11 credits are awarded for the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star rating of 87, compared to the seven credits awarded under the older system.

Other available credits under the energy sector include auditing, existing building commissioning and ongoing commissioning. Commissioning is the systematic process of ensuring that a structure meets the owner's project requirements. In the case of a LEED-EB: O&M project, commissioning

verifies that operations are indeed green and that the process can identify areas of building operations that are not operating efficiently.

Another new category worth noting is indoor environmental quality. 20 points are possible in this section, the most available (except for the energy umbrella). The USGBC established this category to ensure that the thermal comfort, acoustics, indoor air quality, lighting levels and building cleanliness are up to par. Credits can be earned by providing enough daylight views in occupied areas, increasing ventilation, reducing particles in air distribution or assessing custodial effectiveness. Credits can also be earned through "greening" multi-occupant spaces, such as conference rooms and lunch areas.

Since the buildings that can qualify for LEED-EB: O&M have been in service for more than a year, more credits can be earned through implementation and successful results from occupant comfort surveys. In addition, existing buildings are encouraged to have an enforced complaint system regarding environmental qualities.

Building owners and facility managers are reacting well to the new criteria. Many are grateful that the revised system will allow existing building managers to maximize their operations, while remaining sensitive to their environmental impact and without having to implement major upgrades. Existing buildings that have already registered under the old standards can still achieve the LEED-EB certification by fulfilling those standards. However, from now on, all existing buildings applying for LEED must do so by complying with the LEED-EB: O&M prerequisites.

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