

Modern Building Design - Is It Green Yet?

Green building design is an effort to design a building in such a way that it minimizes impacts on the environment and on people. Buildings designed in such a way can reduce the energy spent during construction and in operating the building throughout its lifespan. A wide variety of new materials, techniques and building practices have been developed over the past few decades to help building designers accomplish these goals.

What makes a building design green? Sustainable materials, especially those materials available locally, or those that can be recycled, must be included. Other choices include reusable, renewable and non-toxic materials. Building designers may also choose the orientation of the building on the site to take advantage of the sun or a breeze, or to minimize unfavorable weather conditions. Such choices can minimize the energy spent operating the building.

Construction methods and techniques are chosen to minimize environmental disruption of the building site and reduce construction waste. Renewable energy sources such as active or passive solar or wind power may be included in the building design. High efficiency water, energy and waste systems are often included to reduce the long-term operating costs.

In spite of the recent global economic problems, sustainable building is projected to increase. In part the growth is fueled by a growing number of government initiatives and by increasing public demand for green products and services. More and more often the public prefers, and even expects, to do business with "green" companies.

Many other countries have also implemented green building design initiatives, among them Canada, Israel, India, South Africa, the U.K., Mexico and Malaysia. Green building design standards or initiatives have been considered, recommended or begun.

The unprecedented public demand for all things "green" has spurred a bevy of competing green building standards. The best known is the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System created by the US Green Building Council. Dozens of others exist, yet there is no national green building standard.

The lack of a strong national green building standard has led to some problems. Some buildings that claim to be green are in fact not green at all. Some companies feel they cannot compete without a claim to one standard or the other. In the worst cases, the issue of sustainable or green practices and materials has never even been considered, much less implemented.

The importance of green building design has taken many years to catch on. It has now become an important global trend. Some experts believe the trend towards green building will continue to grow. Others say green building design and practices will become less discretionary and more mandated. It will become standard practice. We're not there yet, but governments and the building industries are moving quickly in the right direction.

About the Author

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