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Selecting the right path to sustainability

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Over the past two decades, there has been a major push to incorporate sustainability concepts into new and existing facilities. The efforts were heavily guided by the LEED certification process along with American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) standards. These were the most recognized guidelines for both state and federal agencies that sought to implement sustainability with statutes and laws.

LEED certification quickly became the most recognizable sign that a building was designed and constructed using environmentally friendly and sustainable methods. However, more and more companies every day are seeking to ensure that their facilities are built using sustainability methods. This has allowed the creation of several sustainability agencies and standards.

They include the Green Building Initiative, which offers the Green Globes (GGC) rating system, and the International Living Future Institute, which offers The Living Building Challenge (LBC) Petals rating system. All of these agencies have great concepts that provide design and construction teams with additional options to create the best sustainable facilities for their clients.

Over the past several years, the industry has seen more companies adopt sustainability practices independently and not place as much weight on specific certification processes. The evolution of a self-directed commitment to sustainability and energy efficiency has allowed owners to brand their own facilities based on merit. This is a true testament to the efforts of the entire industry on the way we design, build, and consume resources.

When beginning any project, a project team should review the various options that are available. They will find that each specific sustainability program has varying, unique qualities that may fit the needs or requirements of each project. Sometimes it will be clear that independently incorporating sustainable design and construction practices such as efficient MEP systems or the use of natural light is the best solution. Whichever path that designers, builders, and facility owners choose, sustainability is an excellent, progressive concept to incorporate.

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