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Green Grocer: Stop & Shop Supermarkets demonstrate leadership in sustainable design

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Grocery stores are known to be low margin businesses, always looking for an edge. With skyrocketing energy costs, smart operators know that savings through efficiency can be passed onto their customers.

In 1998, as the Stop & Shop Supermarket Companies and the American public were becoming increasingly aware of the growing need for energy conservation and meaningful responses to global climate change, Stop & Shop teamed with Rocky Mountain Institute to brainstorm on how they could design revolutionarily efficient stores, while still providing a positive shopping experience for their customers. As a result, they piloted their first major energy efficiency innovation in 2001 by opening a Stop & Shop prototype store designed to use almost 1/3 less electricity than a traditional supermarket, while including a number of other sustainable design features. Located in Foxboro, Mass., their first Low Energy Superstore (LESS) demonstrated annual savings of 8 million kWh, which eliminates emissions of 987 tons of carbon dioxide annually—equivalent to leaving in the ground 374 tons of coal or 650 barrels of oil each year.

Since then, Stop & Shop has not looked back in the pursuit of efficiency. Stop & Shop entered into a partnership with the USGBC to measure how well they are accomplishing their sustainability program and to identify potential improvements. Building on nearly a decade of work, Stop & Shop partnered with USGBC to participate in the LEED for Existing Buildings volume certification pilot program. The partners jointly worked to develop the LEED volume certification process while Stop & Shop assessed and documented its facilities and operations, with a focus on measures that reduce environmental impacts.

Stop & Shop recognized that the new LEED Portfolio Volume Certification process offered attractive economies of scale; the switch from a single-building certification to a volume perspective is critical to giving large companies with multiple facilities built on prototype designs cost-effective incentives to comprehensively address their environmental impacts. It permits building owners to integrate the LEED green building rating system into existing buildings in their company's portfolio in a cost-effective way without sacrificing the technical rigor and integrity of LEED. Stop & Shop is one of only a handful of other market leaders that have committed to meeting USGBC's standards under the Portfolio Program. The pilot initiative enabled Stop & Shop to further standardize environmentally responsible programs and systems in their stores by integrating green operations into multiple existing buildings in their portfolio all at once, using the LEED for Existing Buildings (EB) rating system. In 2008, Stop & Shop received LEED EB certification for 51 of its existing stores in five states, representing over 3.5 million s/f of green building space.

Richard Fedrizzi, president, CEO and founding chair, USGBC said "Stop & Shop is a true leader in green building. Many people think that only new buildings can be green. At Stop & Shop, they understand that there's a lot that can be done to improve a building's energy efficiency and minimize its impact on the environment."

Stop & Shop was the only company in N.E., and the only supermarket chain in the country, to have earned the EPA Energy Star Leaders recognition in 2007. This means that they have demonstrated strong energy management and they often outperform competitors by as much as 10%. For example, Stop & Shop and sister company Giant use about 30% less energy than average supermarkets. To achieve these gains, Stop & Shop has installed "cool" white reflective roof membranes, reducing solar heat gain and therefore lowering the demand for air conditioning—and also adding extra layers of insulation.

Inside the LEED portfolio stores, occupancy sensors controlled by state-of-the-art energy management systems reduce electricity consumption, in addition to similar features such as low-mercury T-8 fluorescent lamps; daylighting by numerous skylights, light tubes and large windows also reduce energy loads and create a more pleasant atmosphere for workers and shoppers throughout the store.

Jose Alvarez, who served as Stop & Shop president and CEO during the certification process, said, "We are tremendously proud to have achieved the LEED-EB Portfolio Volume certification. At Stop & Shop, we are deeply committed to corporate responsibility and believe it is important to embed sustainability in every part of our company. This achievement is proof of our commitment to and our success in leading the industry in green and energy efficient operations and buildings."

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