nerej
CELEBRATING 55 YEARS

Why should you seek LEED EB: O&M certification and how can building commissioning assist you?

December 02, 2008 - Connecticut

Because the escalating cost of energy is on the minds of many facilities directors and university administrators, energy saving strategies are the key in planning for the future of their institutions. By "greening" existing buildings, which account for more than 60% of the nation's electricity consumption and 30% of all greenhouse gas emissions, energy drains can be found and replaced with sustainable options.

The U.S. Green Building Council has developed a LEED rating system to provide credit for energy savings features that are applied to existing, older buildings, called LEED Existing Buildings: Operation and Maintenance as of September 1, 2008. Because of the large number of existing facilities - about 45 million across the nation - LEED EB is the fastest growing new program in the history of facility management.

LEED EB: O&M certification, which replaces the previous LEED EB certification, assists building owners and operators to improve and operate their buildings in a sustainable and efficient manner, today and in the future. The effort expended to retrofit facilities with sustainable features results in a healthier, cleaner work environment, improved efficiency, and lower operating costs.

These advantages should be considered in the decision to seek LEED EB: O&M certification: a starting point for assessment of energy usage, energy cost savings, immediate improved performance, improved indoor air quality, lowered emissions and waste disposal, low cost options for sustainable performance, method of measuring, documenting, and benchmarking sustainability

Property owners and facilities managers can experience a profitable return, both in net cost savings and in the physical life of the building by pursuing LEED EB: O&M certification. According to Sheila Sheridan, vice chair of the U.S. Green Building Council, "LEED-EB certified properties extend sustainability by 2.6 years, with an annual net savings of $170,000."

Eligibility for LEED EB: O&M applies to existing buildings that meet certain criteria. The building must be fully occupied for at least 12 continuous months preceding certification application, with certain exceptions for partial occupancy for an apartment building, hotel, dormitory, convention center, classroom, sports facility, or similar structure.

The LEED EB: O&M certification system is much different than the rating system for new construction (LEED-NC). Rather than new construction and design, LEED EB: O&M certification applies to building operations, processes, systems upgrades, and minor space use changes in a building. However, LEED EB: O&M does embrace sustainable alterations and new additions to existing buildings within certain limits. If the alterations affect more than 50% of the total building floor area or cause relocation of more than 50% of regular building occupants, these buildings should pursue LEED for New Construction certification.

Perhaps your building has never been LEED-certified, or has obtained LEED certification under a

different rating system. These buildings can also pursue LEED EB: O&M certification:

* Non-LEED buildings seeking initial certification and ongoing certification
* LEED for New Construction-certified buildings seeking ongoing certification
* LEED for Schools-certified buildings seeking ongoing certification
* LEED for Core & Shell-certified buildings seeking ongoing certification
* LEED for Existing Buildings-certified buildings seeking ongoing certification

A point-based rating system consists of prerequisites and credits in the following categories: Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, and Innovation in Operations. To obtain LEED EB: O&M certification, the building must meet all prerequisites and earn a minimum of 34 points. A Silver LEED certification requires a minimum of 43 points, Gold 51 points, and Platinum 68 points.

Where does commissioning fit into the process of seeking LEED EB: O&M certification? Commissioning which is a programmed series of construction documentation and testing activities satisfies the prerequisite for LEED EB: O&M under the Energy and Atmosphere (EA) Prerequisite 2, Minimum Energy Efficiency Performance. This prerequisite mandates building commissioning to help identify areas of building operations that are not operating efficiently. A large number of EA credits employing commissioning can also be obtained. These credits pertain to identifying the building's energy requirements, recommending techniques and plans for energy savings, implementing improvements, addressing changes in building usage, and identifying how the building systems are consuming energy.

Finally, commissioning can assist in the Indoor Environmental Quality (EQ) prerequisite and Credit 1.1, establishing indoor air quality performance through modifying outside air intake, supply air fan, and/or ventilation distribution system and developing an indoor air quality management program.

Lindsay Huff, CCP, LEED AP is manager of the Comissioning Department at BVH Integrated Services, Inc., Bloomfield, Conn.