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LEED standards for the retail environment

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The United States Green Building Council (USGBC) is currently in the process of developing LEED standards for the retail environment. For those of you who still may not be aware of the work of the USGBC, the LEED green building standards are nationally recognized methods to benchmark the level sustainability achieved by building projects. As of May of 2008 the USGBC reported that there were over 3.5 billion s/f of building projects that have registered with the intent of becoming LEED certified. There are currently over 80 project teams working on retail projects that are collaborating to create the two new Retail LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) metrics: LEED for Retail: New Construction and LEED for Retail: Commercial Interiors. The pilot program is currently closed to new applicants, but those wishing to develop LEED projects in the retail environment now can use the LEED standard for New Construction or Commercial Interiors v2.2 that is currently available and migrate projects over to the retail standard when it becomes commercially available in March of 2009. The USGBC will provide direction on how to switch the project over when the retail standards are released. Draft versions of both the commercial interior and new construction for retail projects are available for review on the USGBC web site.

The LEED for the retail green building rating system will be based on the new LEED 2009 v3 green building rating system structure. Version 3 of the LEED green building rating system will replace v2.2 when it is released in March of 2009. Workshops and reference guides will be available the month before in February of 2009. The new version of LEED system structure represents a significant evolutionary leap of the system that incorporates three key pieces: updates and revisions to the LEED Rating System, Revisions to the LEED certification process and improvements and streamlining of the LEED online process. Changes to the rating system will include harmonization and alignment of similar credit requirements across the various current LEED building type standards and changes to the importance or weight placed on particular credits.

The most significant change to the current 2.2v by the new LEED 2009 v3 standard is the change in weight given to various credits mentioned above. By assigning more points to energy conservation credits than water conservation or indoor air quality credits, the USGBC can make it easier to achieve project certification by implementing energy conservation measures in a project, which is what the USGBC has done. It is currently estimated that buildings in the U.S. consume 30% of all the energy used by the country and 60% of all the electricity consumed. With a growing national consensus that energy resource depletion and global warming are the greatest threats to our environment and national economy the LEED standards have been adjusted to help mitigate those impacts. For more information about either the new retail standards or v3 2009 LEED standard visit the USGBC web site.

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