



Sorting Out Green Designations

How to ride the green wave in your market.

The big news at the 2008 International Builders' Show (IBS) in Orlando this past February was the launching of a new national green home rating system from the National Association of Home Builders (nahb.org). The voluntary program is both flexible and affordable, say NAHB representatives, with certification paperwork costing less than \$500.

The National Green Building Standard is expected to be approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and published by the NAHB and the International Code Council (ICC) early this spring. The ANSI process ensures that the best technical reviews were used to create the standard.

To correspond with the launch, NAHB members celebrated Green Day at IBS, which included a full day's worth of green educational seminars and a keynote address by noted architect and green building champion William McDonough.

The National Green Building Standard is based on the three-year-old NAHB Model Green Home Building Guidelines, but enhanced to include residential remodeling, multifamily building, and lot and site development guidelines—the first of their kinds in the country. It also reflects advancements in requirements in the International Residential Code and other changes that serve as indications of the dynamic nature of green building.

SEVEN AREAS INCLUDE BUILDING SYSTEMS

Like the Guidelines they are based on, the standard requires builders to include features in seven categories—energy efficiency, water efficiency, resource efficiency, lot development, site development, indoor environmental quality and homeowner education. It also adds the higher Emerald Level to the Bronze, Silver and Gold certification levels for the guidelines and it includes points for using a building system.

"The National Green Building Standard will make it easier for builders to build

green. Having this information available in an ANSI standard means that it's in language that builders don't need a special consultant to understand," says Miles Haber, a multi-family developer in Rockville, MD.

"NAHB's decision to transform the existing guidelines into a standard, exposing its work to the rigors of the ANSI consensus process and peer review, is yet another testament to the firm commitment the association has taken to support inclusive green building," says Michael Luzier, president of the NAHB Research Center. The Research Center is an accredited standards developer and charged with shepherding the ANSI standard development process through a series of public hearings and comment periods.

The NAHB rating system features an online scoring tool, which shows builders how to accumulate points in various categories: water, energy and resource efficiency; lot and site development; indoor environmental quality; global impact and homeowner education. To be eligible for certification, the NAHB program requires a builder to achieve a minimum score in each category.

A HOST OF OTHER GREEN DESIGNATIONS

The NAHB has competition from other rating systems, including the federal government's Energy Star for homes program, a voluntary certification of energy performance, which certified roughly 700,000 homes from 2004 through 2007. This certification is based on cutting energy use by 15% from the 2004 International Residential Code (IRC), which is the Energy Star standard. However, this program doesn't address many green building tenets, including water savings, landscaping, use of a building system, etc.

The chief rival to NAHB's National Green Standard is the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) LEED Program (Leadership in

Energy and Environmental Design), which is a two-year-old pilot program. The LEED program is far more stringent, say builders who have built to both standards—requiring many more hours of paperwork, testing and certification—and the cost associated with it is higher as well. Roughly 12,000 residential units have been certified to the LEED standard in the last two years versus roughly 100,000 homes certified by other green programs. LEED is regarded as the gold standard by many green purists. The USGBC has a goal of one million new LEED-certified green homes by the end of 2010, which is unlikely considering the slowdown in building. (It would require two-thirds of new homes to be certified between now and year 2010.)

Builders in Austin, TX, were the first to launch a green building program for single-family homes, but the phenomenon has spread rapidly. In Seattle's King County, a full 20% of all new homes are now certified as green. More than 60 local organizations have established their own guidelines of what it means to be green. Many of these local organizations have based their model on NAHB's program, just for ease of use and lower costs.

Other notable programs exist as well, including the EarthCraft Home rating system in four Southeastern states; the Environments for Living standard supported by General Electric, one of the largest seller of Energy Star home appliances; and a Healthy House standard from the respected American Lung Association.

Whichever standard you decide to follow as a builder, it's clear that green homes will grab a significant share of the market in the next few years. Here's hoping it allows the building systems industries—concrete, log, modular and panel building technologies that were energy and resource efficient long before this current green wave grabbed headlines—to move well beyond the 30% share of all new housing. ●

