

Green building standards, green product standards and the tile industry

TCNA Green Initiative Committee helps set the standards

By Bill Griese, TCNA Standards Development and Green Initiative manager



When it comes to green architecture and design, there are two areas of standardization – buildings and products. **Green building standards** are the guidelines by which buildings are designed, constructed, operated, evaluated and certified in relation to their environmental impact. **Green product standards** are the criteria by which building products are measured for their environmental performance before they are considered “green” or “environmentally preferable.”

LEED certification: buildings, not products

References to green building criteria and green product criteria are sometimes inappropriately used interchangeably. For example, an architect may mistakenly require products that are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified or that have LEED points. In reality, *only buildings* can be LEED certified, not products, even though some are incorrectly and inappropriately marketed as such.

Even though LEED and other green building standards and rating systems focus on buildings, they can certainly

affect the way products are selected and marketed. In fact, a good portion of the market demand for green products is driven by the requirements of



For information on the sustainability of tile products, including an in-depth review of how to use tile in LEED and other green building projects, visit www.TileTheNaturalChoice.com.

green building standards. Tile industry representatives participate in the development of green building standards to ensure that the use of tile products, which are inherently sustainable, are appropriately considered by LEED and other green building standards.

LEED revisions: good news for tile

The LEED update and revision pro-

cess is dynamic and ever-evolving. Users of LEED routinely submit Credit Interpretation Requests (CIRs) to the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), where official rulings are made. LEED Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) meet regularly to discuss updates and revisions. Additionally, USGBC announced recently that LEED addenda would be released quarterly.


In April this year, USGBC issued its first set of addenda to LEED Version 3. One addendum exempts tile and other inherent VOC-free products from costly emissions testing and will have a positive impact on the way tile products are specified for LEED projects. The addendum to IEQ (Indoor Environmental Quality) Credit 4.3 reads as follows:

Mineral-based finish flooring products such as tile, masonry, terrazzo, and cut stone without integral organic-based coatings and sealants and unfinished/untreated solid wood flooring qualify for credit without any IAQ testing requirements. However, associated site-applied adhesives, grouts, finishes and sealers must be compliant for a mineral-based or unfinished/untreated solid wood flooring system to qualify for credit. ("Document Addenda," LEED Reference Guide for Green Building Design and Construction, 2009 Edition)

Industry influences USGBC, IGCC

Such steps taken by USGBC can be credited to persistent requests and follow-up by TCNA Green Initiative Committee members. Furthermore, similar requests were made and granted


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in 2008 regarding tile product references in the California Criteria of The Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS).

The collective solicitation by tile industry participants for the recognition of the VOC-free nature of tile has also had an influential impact on the development of other green building standards. The current public draft version of the new International Green Construction Code (IGCC) has similar provisions for tile and other VOC-free products.

The IGCC is being developed by the International Code Council (ICC) in partnership with the American Institute of Architects (AIA), ASTM, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning

Engineers (ASHRAE), the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES), and USGBC. Applicable to commercial buildings, the IGCC will provide baseline regulatory framework for green buildings. Similar to the other I-Codes, the IGCC will contain enforceable language that state or local municipalities will have the option to adopt.

As participants in the IGCC drafting process from its inception, TCNA Green Initiative members have been active in the document's development. IGCC Public Hearings will take place in August 2010, Code Development Hearings in May 2011, Final Action Hearings in November 2011, and the finished version is scheduled to be published early in 2012. (More info at www.iccsafe.org)



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With LEED, CHPS, and the IGCC, the types of products used can be a determinative factor in building compliance and certification. Additionally, consumer awareness and needs relative to green products have reached an all-time high. With such demands, the market for green building products and the need for green standards continue to grow exponentially.

Green product standards

While certain aspects of green product standards are consistent with those in green building standards, there are more things to consider when determining whether a product is environmentally preferable. For example, a product with certified recycled content may assist in meeting the recycled content require-

ments specified in a LEED building project, but may fall short in other environmental measures. Recycled content is just one attribute of sustainability, and green product standards aim to address the many other attributes that make products green.

There are many efforts to standardize green building products. Some of those efforts take place in standards organizations such as ASTM. Others take place exclusively within product industries. The TCNA Green Initiative Committee is involved on both levels.

As a voting member of the ASTM E60 Committee on Sustainability, TCNA sees many ASTM sustainability efforts as relevant to the tile industry and will continue to participate in and support its efforts. Additionally, within the TCNA Green Initiative Committee, efforts are underway to create an environmental tile product standard. Different aspects of sustainability are being addressed, some that are common and others that are unique to the tile industry. The draft standard pertains to tile and installation materials and will be completed soon.

In summary, green standards are a strong influence in modern building construction and design. While green building standards focus on buildings themselves, they have transformed the ways products are specified, driving new initiatives for green product standardization. The tile industry continues to be involved in green building and product standardization and is finding new ways to communicate the sustainability of tile products.

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