



## Whitepaper Conversion to LEED Certification

With new construction slowed during the recession, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) has initiated aggressive programs for the conversion of existing buildings to LEED certification. LEED Board member Tim Cole summarized the plan: "Existing commercial buildings in the U.S. account for 60 billion square feet of space. If we want to make a difference for the environment, building occupants and our bottom lines, we must get our existing building stock up to peak green performance."

The USGBC has had great success with launching Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certifications for new construction. The USGBC now hopes to add to that record with progress on the conversion of existing buildings. With the support of GE and its 385,000 million square feet of existing space and with 100 office buildings donated by CB Richard Ellis, the conversion process is off to a good start.

Converting an existing building to LEED certification can be challenging. The success is measured by the increased health benefits and by maintaining a responsible, cost-effective budget. Of course, conversion is easier for unoccupied buildings. However, more and more tenants are requesting LEED certified space and green space rents faster than traditional space.

While green energy practices generate huge savings for buildings and dramatically reduce the carbon footprint, the life span of the conversion usually outlasts the ownership. Today's building owners can justify the expense by reconciling the balance sheet gain on the property's valuation. The more efficient the energy systems are, the more valuable the property becomes.

Of course, there are many ways to initiate the LEED certification for existing buildings. Owners can begin to accrue points by converting building cleaning services and building maintenance practices to green practices as described in the LEED v3 guidelines. In fact, these practices increase occupant health and productivity while reducing absenteeism and actually cost less than traditional cleaning and maintenance programs.

Converting to green cleaning and an aggressive recycling program can yield a 25% annual savings in short order. Meanwhile relatively non-invasive improvements to the heating and cooling systems can reap big savings in energy efficiency and losses attributed to poor health.

Building owners and managers are still surprised by the willingness of occupants to engage and support these cleaning and maintenance conversions. Morale is a sizable benefit to improving building wellness.

Houston: 1330 Post Oak Blvd, 16th Floor, Houston, TX 77056  
Atlanta: 3330 Cumberland Blvd, Suite 500, Atlanta, GA 30339  
Portland: 14525 SW Millikan Wa, Beaverton, OR 97005  
Sacramento: 548 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94104  
Seattle: 93 South Jackson Street, Seattle, WA 98104  
Denver: 3773 Cherry Creek Drive North, Suite 575, Denver, CO 80209

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San Francisco: 548 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94104  
Dallas: 3102 Oak Lawn Avenue, 7th Floor, Dallas, TX 75219  
Las Vegas: 3753 Howard Hughes, Suite 200, Las Vegas, NV 89169  
Austin: 901 MOPAC South, Barton Oaks 1, 3rd Fl, Austin, TX 78746  
Corpus Christi: 4602 Deepdale Drive, Corpus Christi, TX 78413  
NYC: 228 Park Avenue South, New York City, NY 10003  
Boston: 28 State Street, Suite 1100, Boston, MA 02109



Conversion to LEED certification in existing buildings should yield the following benefits:

- Improved Indoor air quality
- Improved disease control
- Reduced absenteeism
- Reduced allergic reactions
- Reduced exposure to harmful chemicals
- Increased water efficiency
- Reduced electrical usage

Building owners who immediately convert to LEED approved cleaning and maintenance practices will realize these significant benefits.

Of course the cost of converting to LEED certification depends on the condition of the existing building and the owner's commitment to change. In many cases, conversion saves money by lowering operating costs. In other cases, structural changes are estimated to cost between \$0.02 and \$5.01 per square foot.

Whatever path the building owner and managers take, they must analyze the operating savings along with the appreciation of the changes. Typically, LEED conversion results in win-win-win scenarios. In these recessionary times, that is a formula for success.

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