

Q & A About USGBC LEED

Industry Panel Discussion from Utah Business Magazine

Q: Do you think we will see more LEED and green building in the future?

Lonnie Bullard, Jacobsen Construction: I think a lot of good is coming from what's happening. We are kind of picking the low-hanging fruit right now with this green building surge. In other words, it makes our people feel good that they can do these kind of things and end up with a LEED certified building.

There's a lot of waste in our business, and people would like to do this, but to move to a higher level is going to be difficult. You have a lot of owners that say, "I want a LEED certified building, but don't spend any money to get there." To move to another level of sustainable projects and the green projects is going to take some very difficult decisions about dollars. People are going to have to pay more to do that.

Rob Moore, Big D Construction Corp.: As Lonnie said, it's not free. There is money involved. There are upgrades in mechanical systems, upgrades in electrical systems that obviously will be more energy efficient and save you money on a monthly basis. Once a customer sees a price tag, which is significant, there's a decision-making process.

Q: Is the price tag going to be something that our industry can work to overcome and promote, or is it going to be legislated?

Clegg Mabey, Sahara Inc.: Right now I think we are being pulled by our clients to be LEED certified. We are doing a LEED certified platinum office building right now, and we are trying to do a retail center with a gold certification. I also see a lot of new technologies coming into the market that are making the savings in terms of energy and lighting easier to get to. The bottom line is having people understand and wanting to spend the money on it.

Chris Smith, Layton Construction Company: I think it is eventually going to be legislated. I liken it to like the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA"). When the ADA came out in 1990, we were all freaking out. I couldn't even buy a sink that was ADA compliant. We were all worried that people in wheelchairs were going to sue us if we didn't get the ramp correct. Now we don't even think about the ADA. It's in every project. It is part of the code. That's where LEED is going to go.

Jim Gramoll, Gramoll Construction: If you look nationally, there is information that says you'll pay a three to five percent premium for a green building. Obviously the higher the certification, the higher the cost. I think this has pushed us to recognize that our industry has been wasteful in the past, and there are a lot of things we can do just as a matter of business that actually pay for themselves. There are things we can put into a building that will pay for itself over a life cycle. There are also things that will help us in construction that are more environmentally-friendly and that are also cost-effective.

Once we start talking about the gold and the platinum levels, we start talking about some real dollars to pay for things that really never pay for themselves. That's where it is going to take either legislation or owners that are willing to pony up that money to be a good citizen.

Bullard: Doing what we are doing now is good, but we can do a lot more. I don't even know that gold and platinum certification is getting us, as a country, where we need to be. It's going to be interesting to see what it takes to move us to those higher levels.

Wilford Clyde, Clyde Companies: Is it really going to be a benefit to society or is it a feel-good type of thing?

Bullard: There is good coming from it, but we need to do more.

Carl Tippets, Pentalon Construction Inc.: It is an evolutionary process. From a PR standpoint, I think Al Gore is probably responsible for taking it into the first level of reality. He has created an environment where people are environmentally conscious right now. But it is going to take something more significant -- whether it is legislation or a mass public movement -- to notch that thing up.

Moore: At the end of the day, we are going to see it become part of our code.

[Green Building] is going to become part of our plans and specs. It is going to be part of what we deal with every day. It is definitely not a fad; it will happen. It will be written in specifications and it will be adopted by cities, counties, and government. I think the ADA is a good analogy.