



Building
Green
with
Wood



MODULE 11

Green
Building Tools

Finding the Right Tools

While the increased interest in sustainable building design has encouraged research into building products and performance, it continues to be a challenge to measure the overall impact of buildings on the environment over the course of their service life – and advice is often contradictory.

Product directories, rating systems and other tools are available to support design and construction decisions. However, these must be evaluated carefully to ensure they meet the specific needs of each application, and to identify any limitations. For example, some green building rating systems may be too narrowly focused, ignoring the importance of far-reaching strategic decisions, while rewarding less important ones disproportionately.

Green building tools include:

- product labelling by third-party certifiers such as independent forest certification programs;
- rating systems that evaluate products/designs such as LEED, Green Globes and National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) National Green Building Standard;
- practice guidelines such as green home building guidelines;
- software such as the ATHENA Institute's EcoCalculator; and
- procurement policies such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's environmentally preferable purchasing.

Green design requires smart tools to decipher all the conflicting information, lack of clarity on definitions, and a constantly changing landscape as the field evolves and expands.



Product Labelling and Certification

As demand grows for products and designs that represent a sound environment choice, more companies are labeling their products as “green”.

TerraChoice Environmental Marketing, a North American environmental marketing firm, has produced a report called the *Seven Sins of Greenwashing* (www.sinsofgreenwashing.org) that offers criteria to help consumers judge whether a product or program is environmentally beneficial. It includes a list of some of North America’s most credible eco-labels – including third-party forest certification labels, cleaning products and organic certification.

TerraChoice President and CEO Scott McDougall says a survey 2,219 consumer products in Canada and the U.S. in 2009 shows that 98 per cent of companies committed at least one Sin of Greenwashing, and some marketers are creating fake labels or false suggestions of third-party endorsement. “Despite the number of legitimate eco-labels out there, consumers will still have to remain vigilant in their green purchasing decisions,” he says.

Wood is one of the few building products backed by well-established third-party certification programs, and Canada has more certified lands than any other country.

Green Building Rating and Assessment

Environmental rating systems can help building industry professionals evaluate and differentiate their product or design. The standards set by rating systems generally exceed those required by building codes.

The best systems measure performance rather than prescribe solutions, and are based on life cycle assessment. They offer a credible, consistent basis for comparison, evaluate relevant technical aspects of sustainable design, and not be too complex or expensive to implement or confusing to communicate.

Most developed countries have adopted one or more green building rating systems, beginning with the United Kingdom, which introduced the BREAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) in 1990. In North America, green rating systems include LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), Green Globes and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) National Green Building Standard. A choice in rating systems helps to strengthen green design, with processes to meet the diversity of building needs, sizes and budgets. It also encourages market competition, ensuring continuous improvement.

The LEED green building rating system, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, addresses specific building-related environmental impacts using a whole building environmental performance approach. In addition



to LEED-NC (for new construction and major renovations), there are versions for existing buildings, commercial interiors, core and shell, homes, and neighbourhood development. (For information in the United States: www.usgbc.org/LEED/. For information in Canada: www.cagbc.org.)

Green Globes, created by the non-profit Green Building Initiative, is an on-line building and management environmental audit. Green Globes for Existing Buildings (GEM in the United Kingdom, Go Green in Canada) helps property owners and managers measure the environmental performance of their buildings against best practices. Green Globes Design is both a guide for integrating green design principles and an assessment protocol. (For information in the United States: www.thegbi.org. For information in Canada: www.greenglobes.com.)



The NAHB National Green Building Standard is the first green building rating system to be approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Building on the Model Green Home Building Guidelines developed by the NAHB Research Centre, it provides a common benchmark for recognizing and rewarding green residential design, development, and construction practices in the United States. Known as ANSI/ICC 700-2008, the National Green Building Standard is a joint effort between the International Code Council and NAHB. More information is available at www.nahbgreen.org.



Environmental Data Sources: Life Cycle Assessment

Software

Life cycle assessment software allows a designer to capture and account for the breadth of environmental and economic considerations in one application.

The **Building for Environmental and Economic Sustainability** (BEES) software program was created by the U.S. National Institute of Standards and Technology. BEES has 10 impact categories: acid rain, ecological toxicity, eutrophication, global warming, human toxicity, indoor air quality, ozone depletion, resource depletion, smog and solid waste.

The **ATHENA Sustainable Materials Institute** is a non-profit organization that provides life cycle assessment services and tools to support green building. Its Impact Estimator for Buildings is a full-capability tool that allows designers to evaluate the environmental impact of each decision as they go through the process of putting a building together conceptually. Its EcoCalculator is a simplified tool, where hundreds of common building assemblies have been pre-calculated, requiring minimal input from the designer.

Procurement Policies

Globally, governments are introducing policies to increase the use of wood in an attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support their sustainability programs. Examples include:

- Changes in national building regulations in many European countries to encourage multi-storey wood buildings – in the United Kingdom, a nine-storey all-wood apartment buildings is the world's tallest wood residential structure.
- In France, the government requires that new public buildings must have at least 0.2 cubic metres of wood for every one square metre of floor area. As part of its promotion of a carbon-neutral public service, the Government of New Zealand is requiring that wood or wood-based products be considered as the main structural materials for new government-funded buildings up to four floors.
- In Canada, the governments of British Columbia and Quebec are moving to policies that will encourage the use of wood in public buildings.
- In 2009, British Columbia introduced a new building code that raises the limit on wood-frame construction to six from four storeys.

The Squamish Adventure Centre is a landmark building that welcomes visitors along the scenic Sea-to-Sky Highway between Vancouver and Whistler, British Columbia. Solid sawn timber has the lowest embodied energy of any major building material, and local harvesting, milling and fabrication minimize transportation energy while providing economic benefits to the region.



Organizations and Networks

The **U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)** and the **Canadian Green Building Council** are non-profit organizations that aim to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated, enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment that improves the quality of life. USGBC has developed the LEED rating system. For more information: www.usgbc.org (United States), www.cagbc.org (Canada), www.worldgbc.org (international).

The **National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)** is a trade association for the housing and the building

industry in the United States. NAHB is a federation of more than 800 state and local associations. Its affiliates include the NAHB Research Centre. For more information: www.nahb.org

The **Green Building Initiative** is a not-for-profit education and marketing initiative dedicated to accelerating the adoption of building practices that result in energy-efficient, healthier and environmentally sustainable buildings by promoting credible and practical green building approaches for residential and commercial construction. For more information: www.thegbi.org.



Credit Valley Hospital, Ontario

Large arching beams of Douglas Fir span the hospital's main lobby and radiation therapy treatment areas inviting the natural light to cascade and envelop the patients and families in a healing embrace. The design is simple in terms of function but dramatic in terms of attractiveness.



Other Resources

Energy Star

(www.energystar.gov) is an international standard for energy-efficient consumer products. First created as a U.S. government program in 1992, it operates in Canada, Europe, Japan and Australia. Energy Star rates energy-related value for products in more than 35 categories, including HVAC systems, lighting fixtures, office equipment, roofing products, windows, doors and skylights.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Environmentally Preferable Purchasing

(www.epa.gov/opptintr/epp) rates building materials and products based on pollution prevention, life cycle analysis, comparison of environmental impacts, environmental performance, and environment/price performance ratio. Product categories include: paints, plumbing, HVAC, lighting, gypsum board, carpets, concrete, coatings, sealants, flooring, doors, and windows.

Metafore's Forest Certification Resource Centre

(www.metafore.org) is a multi-faceted database that features a powerful search tool for locating certified forests and finding certified wood and paper manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors and other industry traders around the world.

