

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR GREEN BUILDING?

BY KIRSTEN RITCHIE, PE, DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIMS FOR SCIENTIFIC CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Each and every one of you reading this article has contributed to the growth and development of green building, and should be proud of our collective accomplishments. We've made a lot of progress advancing the green building profession and our success is demonstrated in some easy metrics: the number of government agencies adopting green building criteria; the growing ranks of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Accredited Professionals; the increasing discus-

States. To date, however, there are about 10,000 LEED accredited professionals, and all of those are not necessarily architects. For green building to really take off, we need to capture the hearts and minds of those entering the profession in the future. How many of you have spoken to high school students about green building?

Another important growth area for green building is the use of life cycle assessment (LCA) in the evaluation of products. When LCA is used for a specific product, the prod-

National Association of Home Builders. Some local jurisdictions like Alameda County, Calif., already have functioning programs. The same employees that are demanding that their employers use green building techniques will seek out (or develop!) programs to recognize their accomplishments at home. Our industry needs to leverage much of the planning and design concepts developed through the smart growth movement, to advance residential green building programs.

Lastly, purchasing decisions will move beyond price to incorporate environmental criteria, increasing the need for auditing and assessment of claims. As evidenced by the growth of 'organic' verification, formal assessments of green building and product claims will grow exponentially. And don't be too surprised if social issues make their way into building products. If there are Fair Trade bananas and Veriflora certified flowers, it can't be long before there are programs verifying that the carpet or furniture was produced in a socially responsible manner. It's coming, get ready. +

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sions of green building in traditional design publications, and the rising number of manufacturers that are modifying their production processes to produce greener products. Collectively, we're getting smarter and better at figuring out what constitutes green building, and continue to improve our surroundings regarding energy usage, water consumption, site selection, and product choices.

But what does the future hold for our industry? Well, there are opportunities to expand education and training to more thoroughly consider environmental issues within the architectural and design professions. The rating system approach to green building design, as exemplified by LEED, has done a lot to move forward the green building agenda. However, we have a long way to go in the education of the design profession and the construction community. According to the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, there are over 100,000 registered architects in the United

States. To date, however, there are about 10,000 LEED accredited professionals, and all of those are not necessarily architects. For green building to really take off, we need to capture the hearts and minds of those entering the profession in the future. How many of you have spoken to high school students about green building?

Another important growth area for green building is the use of life cycle assessment (LCA) in the evaluation of products. When LCA is used for a specific product, the product's environmental information can be evaluated using various impact categories like fossil fuel resource depletion, ecosystem depletion, greenhouse gas loading, and residual hazardous waste. This evaluation can then be summarized and affixed to individual products, similar to a nutrition label. Imagine walking down the aisle of your local Do-It-Yourself retailer and picking up products to read the 'eco-profile' label. "Honey, let's choose this storage system versus that one because there's less greenhouse gas emissions." Far fetched? No one would have imagined that shoppers would get sophisticated enough to discern fat content and net carbs on food labels. For the design community, LCA will also increasingly be used for whole building assessments, realizing that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Residential green building programs are definitely "the next big thing" for our industry. Initiatives are underway both by the U.S. Green Building Council and the



Kirsten Ritchie, PE, is director of environmental claims for Scientific Certification Systems, a third-party evaluation and certification firm located in Emeryville,

Calif. Ritchie came to realize more than 20 years ago that green building was the only way to go after spending her days collecting water quality samples from our nation's burgeoning landfills. Today, she helps guide the future of green building through her hard work on the Materials and Resources Technical Advisory Group for USGBC as well as the ASTM sub-committee on sustainability of buildings. She can be reached at 510-452-8009 or kritchie@scscertified.com.