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## 'Green' construction is moving from 'cutting edge' to 'standard'

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Environmental architect Julie Hendricks of Houston-based Kirksey is quick to say the "green trend" in building will likely be just a memory five years from now.

"Within 20 years, no one in the building industry will speak of green building," she says. "Instead, all buildings will be green, and what is called 'green building' will simply be 'building.' And I won't be a 'green' architect; I'll be back to being simply an architect."

In other words, "cutting-edge" sustainable practice today will soon become standard practice, says Hendricks, whose firm has been a leader in such cutting-edge practices. In December of 2006, Kirksey accepted the official certification of its corporate headquarters as the first LEED-Existing Building facility in Texas. The 25,000-square-foot building, first occupied by the firm in 2000, was retro-fitted to meet the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED requirements.

Although buildings designed to LEED standards are considered good practice by some organizations and a must by others, retro-fitting existing buildings is still not very common (there are fewer than 100 LEED-Existing Building certifications nationwide). But that's only for now, Hendricks says.

"Like the owners of new buildings, the owners of existing buildings seek the progress toward lower operating costs, improved productivity and higher value that green buildings can offer," she says. "They will be looking to ensure that their investments are not devalued by being compared to new green buildings."

The costs to implement LEED for existing buildings are generally higher than seeking LEED on a new building, but they will vary greatly depending on the energy, water and other upgrades that may be necessary to bring a building into LEED compliance.

"As an example, our building was built in 2000, so all of our plumbing fixtures meet the standards of the Energy Policy Act of 1992, which LEED references," she says. "A similar older building would have cost thousands to upgrade to more water-efficient fixtures."

The LEED rating system is based on points, with 85 points available in total and a minimum of 32 required to become certified.

One good place for building owners to start, if they are thinking of LEED-EB certification, is with an energy audit, Hendricks recommends.

"LEED-EB Buildings are required to have an Energy Star rating of 60. Ten points are available within LEED for additional energy efficiency, so buildings that can do well in this respect will have a much easier time achieving certification," she says.

It is also important to look at water usage.

"Plumbing fixtures have come a long way in water efficiency in recent decades," Hendricks says. "Toilets that were installed in the 1950s may be using as much as 7 gallons per flush, compared to the 1.6 gallons per flush mandated in 1992. LEED-EB offers 1-3 points for improving indoor water efficiency over the requirement."

Other important strategies to consider involve greening a building's operations -- for example, owners might set up and manage a vibrant recycling program (for 1-3 points), practice green housekeeping (1-5 points), purchase sustainable paper products (1-3 points) or take measures to reduce indoor air pollutants (1-2 points).

Whether for new or existing buildings, Hendricks says green certifications are here to stay.

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