

# Builders worried about untested green regulations



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**M**ore than two years ago, I wrote about the emerging interest in applying green building and sustainable development standards to homebuilding.

I asked then whether or not home buyers would be prepared to pay extra for a home that is built using techniques and materials that are healthier and more respectful of the environment.

Homebuilders are now asking that same question. But they are asking it with some urgency as actual green building regulatory standards are beginning to emerge on the scene and no one is really sure of the impact they will have on residential development.

There's one thing that is certain, builders don't want to embrace new green building standards that may call for untested construction methods new to our particular local environment and west coast climate.

The horror of leaky condos is fresh enough on everyone's mind. No one wants to repeat past mistakes. Before any new building standards are adopted, developers want to see them thoroughly tested in the field.

However, there is a feeling that the train has left the station when it comes to green building standards as many municipalities, including the City of

Vancouver, are quickly jumping on the green building bandwagon.

Most are beginning to look to one particular green building rating system. They are talking about using this standard to regulate how homes are built and renovated in the future.

That standard is called the LEED Green Building Rating System. (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and it was developed and launched in the U.S. in 2000 to define green building by establishing a common measurement that recognizes environmental leadership in the building industry.

LEED emphasizes strategies for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

The U.S. Green Building Council has licensed a counterpart Canadian organization to promote the standard across Canada and B.C. now has its own Green Building Council.

The LEED standard is uses a point system to certify projects. A project must prove that it has met a certain number of points in six identified categories and the amount of points achieved will determine which level of LEED certification the project is awarded. There are 69 possible points and four certification levels.

The problem with this point system is that it was designed for commercial, institutional and high rise residential buildings and not townhouses and other wood frame buildings, like single family homes. Although work in under way to adapt the system for the residential sector.

Another problem is that to certify a LEED building, points need to be earned during the "commissioning" of a building, after it is built and occupied. This works when the develop-

er of the building is the owner and is operating the entire building as a landlord.

When condo units are sold in a highrise residential tower it doesn't work because no one owner has control over how the building is commissioned and operated.

For example, a project can earn a LEED point if the building operated as a non-smoking environment. However, once a condominium home is sold, no one can regulate whether or not the owner allows someone to smoke in the building.

If smoking occurs in a private suite, how do you prevent the second-hand smoke from moving into common areas, like hallways, without costly and complicated ventilation systems?

The LEED rating system is heavily weighted to the energy efficiency issues, especially in buildings that have full year-round air conditioning. LEED standards were developed in the U.S. and they do not take into account our milder, wetter climate, causing another concern for local developers.

Every developer today wants to be seen as embracing the concept of sustainable development. No one wants to be branded as an environmental menace. However, there is considerable fear in the residential development industry that the LEED standard will be adopted without reasonable modifications and applied as a regulation requiring mandatory green building.

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