

LEED certification can now be revoked by USGBC

By Dani Grigg

IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

In the newest version of the U.S. Green Building Council's green building standards, there's an element that has never before been hinted at in the LEED guidelines: A green building can now have its LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and certification revoked.

That's got some industry professionals a little worried.

"I think it will discourage some owners," said Garrett Chadwick, a LEED-Accredited Professional from Driggs-based Plan One/Architects. "We're already seeing some discouraged by the whole LEED process because of the submittal process. If they make the requirements a little more intense, ... that's certainly going to discourage some of them."

New rules require building owners to submit performance data on an ongoing basis for five years after certification. If they don't comply, their project's LEED status can be rescinded.

The USGBC has said this change was spurred by studies showing some LEED buildings were not performing up to expectations, casting a shadow on LEED's credibility.

"If you don't maintain and operate your building correctly, all the work to certify would be for naught," said Adam Richins, an attorney with Boise-based Stoel Rives. He specializes in issues related to construction and energy, and he's a member of the

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USGBC Idaho chapter's board.

He agreed that some developers might be a little worried about the new requirements – it's a financial invest-



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ment to get a building to where it needs to be to qualify for LEED certification (especially at the higher levels), so to put that investment at risk could make some nervous.

But he thinks it's a good idea overall, part of the USGBC's effort to make their certification translate to something increasingly meaningful.

Architect Bruce Millard of Sandpoint's Studio of Sustainable Design said some kind of performance checkup is absolutely necessary. The Living Building Program, which is a sort of "super-green LEED" program designed by the Cascadia chapter of the USGBC, already requires buildings to wait a year after opening before earning certification. At that point, there's enough data on energy usage to make a determination about performance.

"Buildings do not always get built as designed; buildings do not always perform as they're supposed to within design criteria," Millard said, adding that checking up on buildings can give their certifications a credibility that can otherwise be lacking.

"If they're only doing this to be part of the chic thing, or be part of some PR reality of building so it makes your company look green, I'm not impressed," he said.

"I'm happy they're doing it, I'm happy they're saving energy, I'm happy they're making statements," he said. "But if a big corporation really wanted to make a statement, why don't they take it all the way and test it a year later, and then tell everyone what's happening."

And he said it's important to keep raising the bar.

Steve Simmons, an architect at LCA Architects in Boise, said he disagreed with the concept of checking up on buildings.

"I think if you design a building efficiently for LEED, the owner pays for it," he said. "Whether it's LEED or not, it's in the owner's best interest to operate the building the best they can. To have somebody to try to watchdog over that, I don't think that's necessary."

He said the energy cost savings should be enough motivation.

Some owners are already deciding to build to LEED standards but not seek LEED certification, he said, and this move could push more developers in that direction.