

# With Green Building Standards Plan

By Mark L. Johnson

**HAVE YOU NOTICED?** A lot of buildings are going “green,” and contractors want to present a “green” image when they bid on such projects. Should you market yourself as a “green” contracting firm? You better hold off.

“Talk to your attorneys before you make some marketing claims,” said Maribeth S. Rizzuto, a LEED Accredited Professional and director of training and education for the Steel Framing Alliance, Washington, D.C.

Rizzuto made those comments in March at AWCI’s Annual Convention & INTEX Expo 08. Her 7:45-a.m., hour-and-a-half-long seminar in Las Vegas was packed nearly to capacity with contractors, labor union officials and other interested parties. Rizzuto explained that the construction world is moving beyond rating systems, such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and Green Globes, and toward the adoption of green construction standards.

## ENFORCEABLE STANDARDS

Yes, green building standards—not just rating systems—are currently being finalized. According to Rizzuto, the very first American National Standards Institute accredited standard in the United States, will most likely be the National Green Building ICC/NAHB 700-2008, developed by the International Code

Council and the National Association of Home Builders. Other standards taking shape include California’s green building standard, the ASHRAE 189.1, and Green Globes Design v.1.

What does this mean for contractors?

First, be careful about what “green” building claims you make. Terms such as reused and recycled, for example, mean different things. All steel is made from recycled material, such as scrap cars, old soup cans and refrigerators that have been returned to the steel mills and recharged into the furnaces to make new steel sheet. Reuse would be a practice where you would simply recover and reuse steel

right on the construction site without it being returned to the mill. Anyway, just because you use recycled or reused materials, it doesn’t mean that your operation is “green.” You have to be saving water, energy, emissions, waste and so forth.

Second, many of the standards and rating systems require third-party verification. In some locations the building code jurisdictions will conduct this task. The cost for the verification is assumed by the building developer who is trying to get the project rated.

Third, don’t substitute products on green building projects. Rizzuto told Las Vegas conventioners about a contractor who switched out a low-toxicity paint. The finish was the same, but the application missed the performance benchmarks. As a result, the building owner did not achieve the green building rating they were seeking.

## GREEN SHEENING

Changes are taking place quickly. Federal government agencies like the Department of Agriculture, Department of Defense, Department of Energy and Department of State have adopted LEED “Silver” as the baseline for all building projects. Some states now mandate that municipalities use the LEED rating system.

Given all of this, it’s temping for a contractor to say, “We’re green, too.” But, be careful if you have not launched true, environmentally responsible programs. Attempting to mislead others regarding one’s environmental practices is called greenwashing. Giving the appearance of being green is green sheening.

Either way, advertising green claims without substantiating such claims is bad for business. The public watches what companies do. Third-party verifiers soon will be watching, too. It’s time to listen and learn—so, assign someone to do just that.

“I am imploring all of you to find someone on your staff to do nothing but green building,” Rizzuto said. “If you do not start now, you will not stay competitive.”

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