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Building group unveils 'roadmap' for sustainable operation of existing buildings

By [Daniel Reid](#)

Building owners got a glimpse at the details of a new program that will help them squeeze more efficiency out of their existing buildings while reducing their impact on the environment on March 25.

During an information lunch at the Whalesbone Oyster House in Ottawa, the [Canada Green Building Council](#) (CaGBC) unveiled the [LEED for Existing Buildings: Operations and Maintenance program](#) (LEED EBOM) – a new wide reaching certificate that will serve as a “roadmap” for building owners, addressing everything from good maintenance to food served in the cafeteria in the name of sustainability.

Photo credit: Lunchbox Consulting Inc.

“We’re going to look at everything,” said Erika Mayer, a green building consultant who originally helped bring LEED to Canada.

LEED EBOM opens the doors for efficient buildings that weren’t originally certified in the design or construction phase, measuring a performance period of anywhere from three months to two years.

The new program can also be applied to former LEED buildings seeking re-certification, observing the building’s performance in between the two certifications.

“They’re really trying to close that lifecycle,” said Mayer, adding that LEED will soon cover buildings in all stages from construction to demolition.

In order to help building owners consistently measure and improve operations and maintenance, LEED EBOM is moving to a 100 point system to rate actual performance in seven areas:

- Energy and atmosphere (32 per cent).
- Sustainable sites (22 per cent).
- Indoor environmental quality (15 per cent).
- Water efficiency (13 per cent).
- Materials and resources (10 per cent).
- Innovation in operation (five per cent).
- Regional priority (three per cent).

A minimum total score of 40 earns a standard LEED certification. Silver, Gold and Platinum rankings require minimum scores of 50, 60 and 80 respectively.

Taking into consideration serious environmental concerns like carbon dioxide emissions that



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contribute to global warming, the CaGBC weighs some credits more heavily than others.

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Under the sustainable site category, if a building owner or operator is able to encourage green commutes – offering incentives for occupants to leave their cars at home and telecommute or take the bus to work – there are plenty of points to be had.

“It’s not good enough just to be close to transit, you have to demonstrate (people) are using it,” said Mayer, adding that up to 15 points are available for buildings that can make big reductions. “This is going to be easier said than done, especially if you’ve got multi-tenanted buildings.”

The CaGBC will also be looking inside building owner’s mop buckets, awarding a slew of points under the indoor environment heading for choosing environmentally friendly cleaning products and establishing a green cleaning policy.

In order to help maximize energy, water and emissions savings, the CaGBC is also launching the Green Building Performance System, an online database that will help owners benchmark their building’s performance against other comparables.

Database results from a recent LEED EBOM pilot project are displayed [online](#).

REGIONAL PRIORITIES

One of the most interesting features of LEED EBOM is the introduction of a points system to address specific regional environmental priorities.

According to Mayer – who is also an education program provider reviewer with the United States Green Building Council – decreasing dependence on fossil fuels was a regional priority for people living in urban Florida. In rural Michigan, the focus was agriculture: development pressure on farmland and light pollution in natural habitats.

With a dry Alberta and cold north, Mayer said there’s no doubt about what issue might top many lists in Canada: water.

OTHER ISSUES

As part of the LEED EBOM process, the CaGBC will review a building’s use and disposal of materials, from drywall to fax machines to pencils.

“We’re going to be documenting whether you are purchasing green materials,” said Mayer. “Are you recycling (old computers)? Are you giving them to a school? Or are you throwing them in the garbage?”

Some categories, such as water efficiency, promise to be much more costly than simply introducing blue and black boxes.

“This could be a costly endeavor to get to the minimum (acceptable) level,” said Mayer, adding that plumbing upgrades could make it difficult for many older buildings to qualify for certification.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

In order to qualify for the incoming program, a building must:

- Use 100 per cent of its floor space.
- Have been occupied for at least 12 consecutive months.
- Be in compliance with all environmental laws and regulations.

“The reality is our building stock is in bad conditioned and is poorly managed,” said Robin Hutcheson, a building and energy consultant with Arborus Consulting. “That’s about 90 per cent of the buildings out there.”

The key to improvement is getting to know your building at the operational level which includes keeping accurate records of systems and identifying deficits.

“Focus your energies on where the low hanging fruit is,” he said.

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