

# Green Cleaning: Taking The LEED

*How three organizations moved beyond rhetoric and 'walked the walk' on the path to green certification*

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Six years ago, there were few people in the cleaning industry who were focusing on “green.” Today, facility managers throughout the country are restructuring their cleaning programs to incorporate green cleaning methods. With organizations such as the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), Eco-Logo and Green Seal — to name a few — leading the way, the trend towards a more sustainable environment is shifting janitor’s priorities.

In March of 2000, the USGBC introduced the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program. The program was designed as a common standard of measurement for what constitutes a “green” building. This initial certification was targeted towards new construction and its impact on the environment. In its first year of operation, only 48 facilities registered for certification, while only 12 received LEED certifications.

As time went on and interest in LEED certification grew, the USGBC began expanding the program to include various types of facilities. In 2004, LEED was expanded to incorporate commercial interiors/tenant improvements and existing buildings/operation and maintenance: [LEED-EB](#). In it’s first year, there were 88 registered and 15 LEED-EB certified facilities, including pilot projects.

Since the introduction of LEED, the push towards green cleaning has topped cleaners agendas. According to the USGBC, only six years after it’s inception there are now at least 4,213 facilities registered for certification and at least 613 LEED-certified buildings in all 50 states and throughout 12 countries.

Becoming certified can be a long and detailed process, but its rewards can be worth it. Following are the testimonials of three very different types of facilities that have all achieved LEED-EB certification.

## **Adobe Systems Incorporated**

In 2001, California faced an energy crisis that forced many facilities to revisit their policies and procedures. The entire state was required to take energy-cutting measures to conserve electrical energy. This push towards energy conservation helped [Adobe Systems Inc.](#) focus on its goal to become LEED-EB certified.

“We began implementing EnergyStar programs after the government asked us to reduce our energy consumption by 10 percent,” says George Denise, general manager of facilities for Cushman & Wakefield, the facilities management firm for Adobe. “After certifying our third building [with EnergyStar] in 2004, we realized that the next logical step would be to become LEED-EB certified.”

With the help of their LEED-certified consultant, Tina Henghan from Sebesta Blomberg, Adobe discovered they were already implementing many of the LEED certification requirements. Denise realized that they could register for a silver or even gold certification, but held out for platinum.

Adobe’s certification was based on ratings in six categories: sustainability; water efficiency; energy efficiency and atmospheric quality; use of materials and resources; indoor environmental quality; and innovations in upgrades, operations and maintenance.

“We started by talking with contacts such as our janitorial supply company,” says Denise. “They led us to Steve Ashkin (The Ashkin Group) who then introduced the janitors to green cleaning.”

The staff experimented with backpack vacuums, microfiber dusting products, green chemicals and

maintenance associated with waterless urinals.

“After a couple weeks of testing, we asked the staff to switch back to the old cleaning methods,” says Denise. “They politely asked to continue cleaning with the new methods. It was a great way to approach it because it was their decision to switch to green cleaning.”

Earlier this year, the USGBC awarded a platinum certification to Adobe’s West Tower headquarters building in downtown San Jose. According to Adobe, this tower is one of the world’s first commercial office buildings to earn LEED-EB certification.

To achieve platinum certification of the West Tower, which opened in 1996, Adobe undertook a total of 45 specific projects. These projects have netted a 114 percent return on investment and payback, in some cases, in as few as nine months.

“We have received an overwhelmingly positive response to our USGBC LEED-EB certification,” says Randy Knox III, director of real estate, facilities and security at Adobe. “Many organizations have shown interest in learning how we achieved the certification and what measures they can take to do the same.”

## **Oregon Convention Center**

Built in the late 1980s, the [Oregon Convention Center](#) (OCC) first opened its doors in 1990. An expansion in 2003 launched a LEED certification effort.

“We decided to work towards LEED certification well into the construction game,” says Mike Brown, director of operations. “A lot of what we already put into the design for the expansion qualified us for certification.”

But, he adds, "We wanted to include the existing building in the certification because our goal is sustainability and gold, or even platinum certification."

In an effort to reach those goals, Brown and his team have changed a number of things throughout the facility. "We are in the middle of a project right now to replace all the water fixtures to low/no water usage fixtures," he says. "And because technology has improved over the years, we are now able to successfully use motion sensors in all the restrooms and storage areas." As for cleaning, the OCC began implementing green cleaning chemicals building-wide three years ago.

The biggest challenge with the LEED program, Brown says, is the ability to recognize where you have shortcomings in your program and resolve them.

At the OCC, waste management was a challenge. The staff was forced to work out the kinks on their own because there were no benchmarks at the time.

But, the hard work paid off. In 2004-2005, after implementing their recycling and composting program, the OCC saw an increase of 38 percent in recycling, or 228 tons of waste recycled. The next year, a total of 521 total tons were recycled. "Even though the program is somewhat labor intensive," Brown says, "we have seen some significant savings."

Another challenge, says Brown, has been staying on top of the changes made to the certification programs. The OCC works with a consulting firm, Green Building Services, to help keep up with the changes made by the USGBC. These consultants also direct facility managers on what needs to be done and where their funds are best invested to meet those requirements.

Brown has watched business thrive as a result of the improvements made through the certification process. "Because the OCC is the first convention center to receive LEED-EB certification, we are very

well known throughout the industry," he says. "People ask about what we are doing and recognize us as being on the cutting edge."

Brown is also no stranger to assisting other facilities who want to achieve LEED certifications. Spokane is currently looking at implementing a new recycling program and has looked to Brown for advice. The Portland Zoo also contacted Brown to discuss a heavy composting program. To assist them, Brown walks other managers through his facility to demonstrate the programs that have been implemented.

"There are always going to be challenges," Brown says. "You don't get certification and walk away. It is a day-to-day thing. I am lucky that our parent company, Metro, our senior management team and Merc Commission, which manages the expo center, are all supportive of the programs."

## **California Environmental Protection Agency**

The [California Environmental Protection Agency](#) (Cal/EPA) headquarters building is located in Sacramento. As the largest commercial high-rise in the city, this 25-story, 950,000-square-foot building is one of the first of its kind to receive LEED-EB certification.

According to Craig Sheehy, director – property management for Thomas Properties Group, Inc., the company that leases the building to the Cal/EPA, all janitorial, maintenance, tenant improvements, and equipment replacements are carried out incorporating practices and materials that improve air quality, reduce energy usage, and maximize resources, conservation and recycling.

The first program to be implemented in the facility was the recycling program, which began immediately after the buildings erection in early 2001. Later that year, Sheehy suggested moving all janitorial duties to day cleaning in an effort to improve energy usage.

"Day cleaners deal with recycling, use silent vacuums with HEPA filters, and manage trash in break

rooms and bathrooms, to name a few,” says Theresa Parsley, assistant secretary for facilities programs at the Cal/EPA. “We do have cleaners that come in from six to eight p.m. to do more heavy and noisy cleaning such as carpet and power cleaning, but even they only do one floor at a time so we can reduce the amount of after-hours lighting needed.”

By becoming involved in the process, and working with manufacturers to obtain “green” products for use in the facility, cleaners have accepted their roll in maintaining LEED-EB certification.

Indoor air quality has also been a big concern, and Cal/EPA is committed to minimizing the introduction of chemicals into the building that would affect air quality, according to Sheehy. Instead of using 50 or 60 different cleaning chemicals, like other buildings of the same size, Cal/EPA uses only one cleaner for daily cleaning — a Hydrogen Peroxide product called Alpha HP. It is the glass cleaner, multi-purpose cleaner, disinfectant, hard floor cleaner, carpet extractor, carpet shampoo and spot cleaner.

In addition to products and chemicals, the Cal/EPA introduced waterless urinals on four floors in 2003. The change has been successful in reducing water usage and maintenance associated with the previous fixtures. When installed throughout the entire building, Sheehy expects to save over one million gallons of water annually and a significant amount in repair costs.

“We wanted to hold ourselves to the same level of commitment that we require other companies work at,” says Parsley. “If we want to be seen as leaders, we have to walk the walk.”

## **Re-certification**

According to the USGBC, re-certification of LEED is required at least once every five years, though buildings can re-certify annually. Annual certification might be beneficial in cases where building operators want yearly feedback on building performance for performance reviews and budgets, or in

cases where LEED certification scores are included in lease agreements as a metric for quality.

Applications for re-certification only require documentation of changes in policies and performance data that have occurred since initial certification.

The Cal/EPA building plans to go through recertification in 2007. According to Parsley, a new addition to LEED-EB certification that the Cal/EPA is anxious to review are the worker productivity measurements, which will allow facilities to determine whether the programs they have implemented have an impact on employee sick time.

"We see green and sustainability as humanistic," says Parsley. "We are not just taking care of the Earth, we are taking care of the people on Earth."

*Article photos courtesy of: Adobe Systems Inc. and the California Environmental Protection Agency*

Cited from: Streit, Corinne. "Green Cleaning: Taking The LEED." *Sanitary Maintenance* Nov. 2006. *Sanitary Maintenance*. Web. <[www.cleanlink.com](http://www.cleanlink.com)>.