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The demand for LEED Gold and Silver certification for new commercial buildings is being driven at least partly by major tenants, says green building expert Ian Theaker.

'Early days' for green building, but growth evident

Manufacturers have responded, so specifying 'green' now easier

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Despite a modest start, green building is accelerating as a trend. At the Canada Green Building Council's annual symposium in Toronto last month, delegates interviewed on the subject, had varying opinions about how far we've come and what's needed to reach the boiling point.

"It's still early days," says Daniel Leeming, an urban planner with The Planning Partnership in Toronto, adding that local governments have yet to establish guidelines for sustainability. "Municipalities are reluctant to give up on their development charges or fees. We're still trying to figure out what are appropriate incentives."

Leeming sees LEED for Neighbourhood Development, which is currently under review in Canada, as a positive, fundamental step for greening entire areas beyond the scope of a single building.

Toronto architect Michaela Jones says small-scale residential, commercial and institutional projects often don't fit into a LEED framework because certifying a building can cost \$40,000 to \$50,000.

"You need to have that much money on top of the project," says Jones, who draws from different rating systems for elements such as energy efficiency or materials reuse in order to serve her clients.

"I don't see it (green building) as separate from the work that we do," Jones says. "You want to provide the best

architecture and design that you can, and that means siting the building properly, orienting the windows, having shading, and minimizing your HVAC system. So you're going to do all those things anyhow, whether or not you get a rating."

Kyle Gregoire, an engineer who handles sustainable design with Dillon Consulting's Windsor office, says Europe's Passivhaus standard sets a higher bar for energy than North American rating systems do because it promotes 'intelligent' building design and rethinks our relationship with energy.

"We're spending a lot of money on alternate energy sources, which is great, but that's only because we're conditioned to accept the consumption levels we have today."

Jordan MacDonald, of ThermalWise in Halifax, offers performance testing and other services to organizations seeking LEED for Homes certification for single and multi-family residences and nursing homes up to six storeys high. He says energy tops the list of demands.

"That's obviously where everyone wants to look because they see an immediate payback," MacDonald says, adding that occupants are asking builders to minimize off-gassing and improve indoor air quality.

Ralph Karawani of Cofely Services in Montreal works to provide major commercial real estate customers with the electro-mechanical engineering expertise they need for LEED certification.

"There are lots of rules and concepts out there. A lot of providers of products and services can talk a good game, but how do these pertain to making the building greener? It's good to have a body to define that."

Robert Drew, an architect with Perkins + Will in Vancouver, says LEED has prompted manufacturers, fabricators and suppliers to develop affordable green materials which, in turn, has enabled the industry to build green rather than simply talk about it.

"If you go back to 2002, 2003 or 2004, we had to look hard to find products that were green. Now, pretty well any product we put in a building is available as a green product. They're easy to find and not that much more expensive,"

LEED has also had a huge impact on training at Perkins + Will.

The firm now requires that its architects receive LEED accreditation. "We provide that training. It's a term of their employment," Drew says.

Shawn Vanderheyden, manager of sustainable construction with PCL Constructors Canada in Mississauga, says his company has also developed in-house training to ensure employees are equipped to work on LEED projects.

The CaGBC's recent emphasis on existing buildings has helped drive work, and PCL has been involved in many LEED-registered revitalization projects in the downtown core, including the Royal Trust Towers and 180 Wellington.

"LEED in general is being used on the majority of our projects," Vanderheyden says, adding that PCL launched a renewable energy division within its Toronto district in order to pursue projects stemming from Ontario's Green Energy Act and Feed-in Tariff program.

Ian Theaker, who served as the CaGBC's first LEED program manager starting in 2004 and now coaches municipal and commercial clients who want to build green, says LEED has been a driving force in Canada yet is serving just the top quarter of the ICI market.

The CaGBC introduced Green Up, a building performance program, to focus on the 75 per cent of the market LEED isn't touching, and Theaker says he's pleased with the results, pointing to new buildings in downtown Toronto with LEED Silver and Gold certification as evidence.

"This is largely in response to major tenants wanting to fulfil their corporate social responsibility mandates. They're demanding LEED Silver or Gold certification for their major Class A office buildings."



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