



issue backgrounder

# FOCUS

## The Paint Industry: Doing its Part for a Green Building Consensus

**T**he burgeoning field of “green building” is gaining momentum and interest, with the term becoming a part of our everyday lexicon. But what is green building?

Green, or sustainable building is the practice of creating and using healthier and more resource-efficient models of construction, renovation, operation, maintenance and demolition. There are many facets of green building: energy efficiency and renewable energy, water efficiency, environmentally preferable build-

ing materials and specifications, waste reduction, toxics reduction, and indoor air quality. For its part, the National Paint & Coatings Association (NPCA), which represents the U.S. paint and coatings industry, is very active in the green building dialogue since its products are integral components utilized in construction.

Because the green building movement is defining standards cited in construction specifications, industry’s product manufacturers will need to be aware of aspects that may impact their product offerings, a challenge to which the paint industry has already risen.

This *Issue Backgrounder* discusses the leadership role NPCA, on behalf of its industry, has taken in the green building arena.

### BACKGROUND

To be clear, green building is relatively confined to commercial building, and hasn’t become as widespread in residential construction. According to U.S. Department of Energy statistics, as of 2006, buildings used 40 percent of the total energy consumed in both the United States and European Union. Of the energy consumed by buildings in the United States, 54 percent was consumed by residential buildings and 46 percent by commercial buildings. In 2002, buildings used approximately 68 percent of the total electricity consumed in the United States with 51 percent for residential use and 49 percent for commercial use.





SOLAR PANELS

Some 38 percent of the total amount of carbon dioxide in the United States can be attributed to buildings, 21 percent from homes and 17.5 percent from commercial uses.

Considering these statistics, reducing the amount of natural resources buildings consume and the amount of pollution given off is seen as crucial for future sustainability. That's why it is so important for stakeholders in the green building discussion and standard-setting process to be active participants, a role in which NPCA is a committed actor.

## BUILDING CONSENSUS

NPCA is a member of the North American Coalition on Green Building, a group consisting of more than 30 trade associations representing industries affected by the green building movement. The coalition seeks to promote green building concepts and standards that reflect the views and concerns of all its stakeholders. While the coalition supports the overarching goal of building more sustainable buildings, it maintains that the supporting technologies must be feasible, and that the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Rating Systems are not the only green building certification systems available for project certification.

## LEED®

Each LEED® Rating System is a green building certification process administered by the U.S. Green Building Council. The LEED® Ratings Systems include LEED® for New Construction, LEED® for Existing Buildings, LEED® for Commercial Interiors, LEED® for Core and Shell, and other construction categories. Each LEED® Rating System allows projects to earn points for green and sustainable development practices such as brownfield redevelopment, erosion and

sedimentation control, water efficiency, optimizing building energy performance, using low-emitting paints and coatings, and many others. For basic LEED® certification, a project must earn between 26-32 points. If a project earns between 33-38 points, it will be designated as LEED® Silver. If a project earns between 39-51 points, it will be designated as LEED® Gold. Finally, if a project earns between 52-69 points, it will be designated LEED® Platinum. Platinum is the highest level of LEED® certification.

LEED® has become the certification process of choice for U.S. commercial green building construction since its debut in the late 1990s. However, industry believes that LEED® should not be viewed as a nationally-recognized consensus process for the development of green building standards because, for most of its history, it has been open only to selected categories of organizations, rather than to all interested and affected parties. In fact, the U.S. Green Building Council board of directors voted to end its policy prohibiting trade associations from joining the council only in the last few years. As a result, many interested parties did not have meaningful participation in the development of the earlier versions of the LEED® Rating Systems.

## GREEN GLOBES

Green Globes is a green building rating and assessment system that was first developed in Canada in 2000. The Green Globes System was introduced to the United States in 2005 and is administered by the Green Building Initiative. The Green Globes Rating System is similar to LEED® in that both systems use online tools that allow projects to earn points for green and sustainable development practices. However, Green Globes is gaining in popularity as an alternative to LEED® because it is generally viewed as more directly applicable, practical, and feasible for industry compliance.

## NAHB GREEN BUILDING STANDARD

In addition to the Green Globes Ratings System for commercial construction, NPCA and the North American Coalition on Green Building support development of a voluntary consensus standard under the more transparent and equitable American National Standards Institute (ANSI) procedures. As such, NPCA has served as a technical representative on the committee established by National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Research Foundation to develop the new Green Building Standard (GBS). When the process is complete, the NAHB GBS will be the only ANSI accredited green building standard for residential construction. This effort involves industry and environmental experts and advocates from across the United States. Far from focusing only on existing standards in certain areas, the ANSI effort is taking a holistic approach to the home building process, looking at critical construction and ventilation design and equipment specifications that can serve to minimize total environmental impacts of home construction. In addition to the building standards, the ANSI standard will also contain a section on maintenance of the completed structure.



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## AT ISSUE

NPCA recently formed a Green Standard Work Group that is comprised of nearly 50 individuals representing various member companies. The formation of the work group became necessary after NPCA learned that there were key green building and green product standards that would be undergoing revision in 2008.

The LEED® Ratings Systems are currently being revised. There is a specific credit for paints and coatings in the LEED® Rating Systems. Indoor Environmental Quality Credit 4.2 pivots on the universally endorsed goal of reducing the quantity of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) — indoor air contaminants that are odorous, irritating and/or harmful to the comfort and well-being of installers and occupants. However, as crafted, the VOC requirements in Indoor Environmental Quality Credit 4.2 are extremely limiting, from industry's view. This LEED® credit hinges on VOC content limits for architectural paints, coatings

and primers applied to interior walls and ceilings established by Green Seal™ GS-11 Paints Standard, which was recently revised to meet significantly lower VOC requirements.

Green Seal™ is the premier independent ecolabel in the United States, having certified more than 2,700 products and services; Green Seal™ is to products what LEED® is to buildings — the gold “green” standard. In the face of the overly stringent, revised Green Seal™ GS-11 Paints Standard, NPCA and its Green Standards Work Group continue to advocate that the indoor air quality impact of coatings is limited to the time of application and drying and is not a factor for eventual building occupants. Increasingly, the use of low-emitting paints is also identified by builders as one way to gain an “easy credit” that will help them minimize the environmental footprint of a home construction project.

## A BETTER ALTERNATIVE

The current draft of the NPCA-supported NAHB Green Building Standard, which is going through the ANSI accreditation process, acknowledges that low-emitting paint and coatings products are available for use in residential construction. It cites VOC-limiting standards requiring no and "low" VOC products, and products conforming to the California Air Resources Board's Suggested Control Measure — the lowest in the country given California's particular air quality and ozone challenges. It also cites commercial standards such as Green Seal™, and Scientific Certification Systems. The NAHB Green Building Standard also acknowledges GREENGUARD — an indoor air quality certification program administered by the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute — as providing evidence of acceptability from a product emission standpoint. The draft retains flexibility for product selection where regional climate differences may limit a builder's options — allowing conformance to the California Air Resources Board's Suggested Control Measure to qualify for conformance — but providing additional opportunities to select products that conform to commercial standards that address emission potential.

Already, the green building trend is becoming permanent. In July 2008, California became the first state in the nation to adopt a green building code for all new construction. The California Building Standards Commission adopted the California Green Building Standards Code, which will be voluntary until 2010, when its provisions are expected to become mandatory. The voluntary period is intended to give builders, local governments and communities time to adapt to the new rules, according to the commission.

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NPCA hopes to expand the interest, scope and prevalence of green building. Many industry manufacturers have already responded with products that meet certain standard-setting organization's definitions. NPCA and the North American Coalition on Green Building are seeking to offer wider consideration of suitable standards that would allow for improved building product availability.

For more information, please contact NPCA's Stacey-Ann Taylor ([staylor@paint.org](mailto:staylor@paint.org)) or Steve Sides ([ssides@paint.org](mailto:ssides@paint.org)).



NPCA is a voluntary, nonprofit trade association representing paint and coatings manufacturers, raw materials suppliers and distributors. As the preeminent organization representing the paint and coatings industry in the United States, NPCA's primary role is to serve as ally and advocate on legislative, regulatory, and judicial issues at the federal, state and local levels.

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