

LEED for Homes

What is LEED for Homes?

LEED for Homes is a green home certification system for assuring homes are designed and built to be energy- and resource-efficient and healthy for occupants. LEED can be applied to single- and multi-family homes and is intended for both market-rate and affordable housing. USGBC began the pilot test of LEED for homes in August 2005. Piloting ended and LEED for Homes officially launched in February 2008. As of April 2009, 1,908 homes had received LEED for Homes certification, and 9,667 had registered their intent to seek certification.

What is a green home?

Compared to a conventional home, a green home uses less energy, water and natural resources; creates less waste; is smartly located and built with as little impact on the land it sits on as possible; and is healthier for the people living inside.

What are the benefits of a LEED home?

LEED-certified homes are built with efficiency and health in mind, so they have the potential to save residents money on energy and water bills, reduce their carbon footprints and environmental impact, and protect their health. Based on Home Energy Rating System (HERS) tests performed on homes certified during 2008, the average home certified at the LEED-Certified level is predicted to have potential energy savings of up to 30% over homes built to International Energy Conservation Code, a widely used standard; the average LEED-Platinum home could use as much as 60% less energy than an IECC-built home. Many LEED homes gain certification in part due to a focus on indoor environmental quality. These homes typically have better ventilation, use paints and products that emit little or no dangerous volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and/or implement advanced moisture-control strategies, among other health considerations.

Why should I build a LEED home?

LEED has become recognized in the commercial building sector as the national benchmark of performance for green buildings and has rapidly gained recognition among the public at large. LEED for Homes is designed to serve the residential construction industry. Homebuilders using LEED will be able to differentiate their homes as representing the highest quality of green homes on the market. Furthermore, LEED certification will make it easy for homebuyers to readily identify high-quality green homes.

How can consumers compare green homes?

One of the many challenges faced by a homebuyer is comparing a green home to another home. Any home can be called "green," but how does the homeowner know that it really is green? LEED certification is something that consumers can look for to readily identify green homes that have been third-party inspected, performance-tested and certified to perform better than conventional homes. LEED certification verifies that the home you are purchasing was designed to meet the highest criteria and is operating exactly the way it is supposed to. Visit www.thegreenhomeguide.org for more information.

What is the mission of LEED?

LEED is a voluntary program developed by USGBC to promote the transformation of the homebuilding industry toward more-sustainable practices. LEED recognizes leadership and rewards the top-performing new homes in terms of resource efficiency and environmental stewardship. LEED is a collaborative initiative that actively involves all sectors of the homebuilding industry, including builders, homeowners, product manufacturers, service providers and affordable-housing developers. USGBC believes incentives will support market leadership, which is a principal driver toward market transformation.

How was the LEED for Homes certification program developed?

LEED for Homes was developed via USGBC's open, consensus-based development process. The LEED for Homes Committee, a diverse group of USGBC volunteers elected to represent the homebuilding industry, has primary responsibility for the development and ongoing refinement of the certification system. In addition to the pilot testing phase, LEED for Homes has undergone two public comment periods, opportunities for all interested parties and stakeholders to provide their feedback. The final step in the process is a member ballot of the certification system, which took place in late 2007. For more information on USGBC's consensus process, visit www.usgbc.org/AboutUs.

What is the difference between LEED for Homes and other green homebuilding programs?

There are currently more than 70 local or regional green homebuilding programs in the United States. Each of these programs is unique, with its own specifications and requirements. LEED is the most-rigorous national homes certification system with clearly defined and established benchmarks for green homes. It enables homes anywhere in the country to obtain a green LEED rating that can be recognized by homebuyers nationwide. LEED is a consensus-based national system for green homebuilding that is developed and refined by a diverse committee of national experts and experienced green builders.

Will LEED include affordable and multifamily homes?

LEED includes both affordable and multifamily homes. Affordable housing projects' participation is supported by a generous grant from The Home Depot Foundation, which covers many of the costs of qualified projects. The U.S. Green Building Council waives such projects' registration fees. For more information, visit www.thegreenhomeguide.org/affordable. In order to address the unique needs of affordable housing, the LEED Homes Committee formed an expert Affordable Housing Working Group to review the pilot rating system for its applicability to affordable homes, and to make recommendations for specific measures that need to be refined, removed and/or added to the certification system to better meet that market's needs. If you are registering 10 or more single-family homes or a multi-family project with 50 or more units, your project is eligible for volume-based price discounts. Please contact your Provider for pricing information. To learn more about volume building pricing and other information, contact your LEED for Homes provider, whom you can find at www.usgbc.org/leed/homes.

Will LEED include home renovations?

The first phase of LEED for Homes is focused on the construction of new homes. Existing homes undergoing full gut rehabs (down to the studs on at least one side of each exterior wall) are eligible to participate in the program. USGBC and the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) have partnered to create REGREEN, the first nationwide green residential remodeling guidelines for existing homes. Unlike LEED for Homes, REGREEN is not a certification system. Instead, it is a guideline to green home renovation best practices, detailed for 10 different project types, including kitchens, bathrooms, basements, outdoor living, gut rehabs and deep energy retrofits. It includes integrated pre-design issues to be considered, strategies by building system and case studies for each project type. REGREEN was launched in March 2008 and can be downloaded free at <http://www.thegreenhomeguide.org>.

How will the quality of LEED homes be assured?

The strength of the LEED program is rigorous third-party verification and documentation. Each LEED home will undergo both on-site inspections to ensure that the LEED features have been installed correctly, and thorough performance testing to ensure proper performance.

Who is responsible for rating a LEED home?

LEED homes are rated by LEED for Homes Providers, local organizations with documented experience and expertise in their region's market. A LEED for Homes Provider has three primary roles in a given market:

- Marketing LEED to builders;
- Providing green home rating support services to builders;
- Training, coordinating and overseeing LEED-qualified raters and builder support staff.

LEED for Homes Providers are located around the country and contracted through the USGBC to provide services to builders. They have demonstrated outstanding abilities and have a proven record of supporting builders in the construction of high performance, sustainable homes. See the list of providers at www.usgbc.org/leed/homes.

How can my organization be a LEED for Homes Provider?

Thirty LEED for Homes Providers are serving the country's leading housing markets. The providers have undergone a rigorous selection and training process and work with the builders in the delivery of LEED for homes.

What is the process for rating a LEED home?

Specified performance tests and inspections will be conducted by the LEED for Homes Provider. When all of the LEED features have been verified, a certificate will be issued to the builder for that qualified LEED home.

How much will it cost to earn a LEED Home rating?

Documentation and verification fees for LEED are paid to and established by each LEED for Homes Provider. The cost of verification will vary with size of the home, the certification level sought (i.e., Certified, Silver, Gold, Platinum), travel time required by the rater, the number of homes being built, and the builder's experience with green homebuilding techniques. Certain areas may have cost incentives provided through utilities, state energy organizations or corporate sponsors.

How can I participate in LEED for Homes?

Builders, designers and other professionals interested in registering a project with LEED for Homes should contact a local LEED for Homes Provider for details. A Provider can be found at www.usgbc.org/leed/homes. Homeowners interested in buying or building a LEED home should discuss LEED with their builder, designer or real estate professional. This FAQ document and other information available at www.thegreenhomeguide.org and www.usgbc.org/buildleedhomes can help you and your housing professional begin your discussion.

How can I stay up to date on the progress of LEED for Homes?

USGBC members interested in LEED for Homes Committee activities can join the LEED for Homes Corresponding Committee e-mail listserv; sign up online in the Your Account section of the USGBC Web site (www.usgbc.org/YourAccount). Corresponding committee members receive committee meeting minutes, periodic updates and announcements regarding LEED for Homes volunteer opportunities.

Interested parties who are not USGBC members can join a public announcement distribution list by request via homes@committees.usgbc.org.

Where can I find out more about green homebuilding?

USGBC's Green Home Guide Web site, at www.thegreenhomeguide.org, features resources on green homebuilding for consumers. Builders and other professionals can find resources at www.usgbc.org/buildleedhomes. USGBC offers a diverse range of educational opportunities, including webinars and workshops led by USGBC's highly trained and experienced faculty, including many LEED for Homes-specific offerings. Visit www.usgbc.org/education for information. The LEED for Homes Reference Guide, available for purchase at www.usgbc.org/store, will guide you through planning and executing your LEED for Homes project. To get connected with fellow green building professionals locally, you can join your USGBC chapter at www.usgbc.org/chapters.

LEED contact information

For questions about LEED, please call the USGBC at 202-828-7422 or leedinfo@usgbc.org.