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Workplace Insights

Five Things to Expect About LEED Version 5

The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) will be rolling out LEED Version 5 (v5) this year, and that rollout is anticipated to include a number of updates from past versions of the sustainability-focused framework. If LEED certification is something your company is considering with your next design update, here are just a few of the changes you can expect to see:

1. Reducing Embodied Carbon. While past versions of LEED included a strong emphasis on reducing the overall carbon footprint, LEED v5 will feature an additional focus on embodied carbon in the materials used to construct the building itself...those items that cannot be changed once the facility is built. LEED v5 will require a total carbon assessment for a 25-year period as a pre-requisite. This means that those seeking LEED certification will need to perform, at a minimum, a 25-year analysis of all carbon emissions from the building, operationally and embodied in the materials and construction process.

In addition to the prerequisite, a significant number of credits, including new credits

and point increases for existing credits, have been categorized to specifically address embodied carbon. This includes credits addressing Whole Building Life-Cycle Assessments (LCAs), Usage and Analysis of Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs), Building and Material Reuse, and Construction and Demolition Waste Diversion.

2. Preserving Ecosystems. LEED v5 prioritizes ecosystem preservation by advocating for sustainable land practices that minimize ecological disruption and promote biodiversity. It also focuses on the protection of natural habitats and the integration of green spaces within urban development to enhance environmental resilience.

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LEED Platinum certification now, for the first time, has additional requirements beyond a basic point threshold. One the biggest requirements is that a building must have complete electrification, and all energy must be fully sourced from on- or off-site renewables.

- 3. Building Resilience.** When released, LEED V5 is expected to reward buildings created with operational preparedness in mind, e.g., those able to withstand natural disasters and climate change. Those seeking certification will need to not only identify the plans in place, but also show the dollar values of the investment made and the ability to guard against lost operational time. Additionally, projects will be assessed on their adaptive reuse strategies, emphasizing the importance of sustainable materials that contribute to long-term durability.
- 4. Promoting Indoor Air Quality.** LEED v5 is introducing a new credit for continual assessment and verification of measurable indoor air quality, and the prerequisite is verification of ventilation and filtration, including indicators for infection risk management. This update prioritizes the ongoing monitoring of pollutant levels and the use of advanced filtration technologies to maintain a healthy indoor environment. The new standards will also encourage the integration of biophilic design elements to naturally improve air quality and occupant well-being.
- 5. Advocating Equity.** LEED v5 integrates equity into its framework by encouraging the development of transportation systems that reduce reliance on personal vehicles, thereby promoting accessible and sustainable mobility options for all community members. This approach not only aims to lessen environmental impact but also strives to address social disparities by enhancing equitable access to efficient and inclusive transportation networks.

While the above information is based on the LEED v5 draft in Public Comment 2, there may be some slight changes when the official version is released later this year. Make sure to keep reading Hixson's Workplace Insights to stay on top of what you need to know!

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Direct any comments or questions to:

**Scott Schroeder, Vice President,
Manager of Client Development**

Workplace and Science + Technology

sschroeder@hixson-inc.com

Phone: 513.241.1230

www.hixson-inc.com