

[Boundless LEED EB potential](#)

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WEST MICHIGAN - LEED for Existing Buildings certification has evolved from being more construction related to a pure operation and maintenance protocol.

There's tremendous opportunity for significant environmental improvement in the existing building inventory in West Michigan with LEED EB because 98 percent of buildings out there are not new construction, according to Sam Pobst, owner of Eco Metrics LLC. Pobst is a green building consultant who works with building owners, architects, contractors and municipalities to help certify buildings under the LEED protocol.

The goal of LEED EB is to maximize operational efficiency while minimizing environmental impacts, addressing whole- building cleaning and maintenance issues, recycling programs, exterior maintenance programs, and system upgrades.

"The use of these standards is really interesting particularly for institutional users and companies that have building portfolios such as schools, municipalities, hospitals and healthcare groups," Pobst told MiBiz. "Once adopted, the plans and policies can be used throughout the whole business inventory."

Pobst said LEED EB came about in 2005 and is now gaining market acceptance. "It's a terrific facility management tool," said Pobst, noting building managers are aware of the economic advantages of utilizing the standards. LEED EB is similar to ISO 9000, intended to be for continuous improvement. "Once you launch something, you never stop doing — you measure, verify and document the performance of your building and continually look for opportunities to improve the performance of your buildings," Pobst said.

Linda Frey, executive director of the U.S. Green Building Council West Michigan, said LEED EB helps building owners and managers solve building problems. "It helps them improve their building performance over time, and it reduces numerous cost streams," Frey told MiBiz. "It looks at healthier workspaces for employees and provides public recognition for them as being leaders in sustainability."

Benefits to LEED EB include a cost saving especially around energy, according to Renae Hesselink, vice president of sustainability for Nichols Paper & Supply Inc. in Spring Lake.

"Several policies have to be in place in order to obtain the certification," said Hesselink, vice chair of the USGBC West Michigan board of directors and a LEED for schools advocate. As an example, companies need to have a no-smoking policy in place. They cannot allow smoking on company property or have a specified smoking area, she said.

Through LEED EB certification, mechanical systems are tested and balanced. Professionals inspect and test HVAC systems and make recommendations for upgrades to become more energy efficient. Hesselink said appliances, HVAC systems, lighting and anything that uses energy has to achieve the Energy Star rating in order to go for LEED EB.

Healthy employees are also a factor with LEED EB. "We look at the building holistically — not just the way the building operates on an energy basis, but how it relates to the health of the occupants," Pobst said. Chemicals in the workplace, including those used for cleaning, and the type of furniture and construction materials are all examined.

"If you're going to do a renovation and put in carpet or paint, we can eliminate the toxins from those contributing materials," Pobst said, noting that fresh air can be brought into buildings in an economical way.

An economic analysis is done for every single decision for every credit in an attempt to calculate the payback time. Depending on the client's tolerance, payback can be achieved in two years or about seven years if going for the highest LEED platinum rating.

USGBC statistics show worker productivity increases from 2-18 percent with LEED EB.

Pobst is currently working with eight clients on LEED EB projects. The renovation of Cascade Engineering's headquarters on Innovation Court SE is a showcase project for LEED EB and achieved the first platinum level in Michigan.

In a major renovation that will pay for itself in five years, all of the mechanical systems were significantly upgraded and more windows were added to improve the atmosphere for employees. Through the upgrades, employees have the ability to control their own temperature and the amount of light at their work surfaces. Green cleaning products were added for a positive impact on employee health. "We measured an 8-percent gain in productivity," Pobst said.

Pobst is the external LEED project manager for Nichols Paper's headquarters building in Muskegon. Hesselink said the 104,000-square-foot building is primarily warehouse space and was purchased about four years ago and renovated with a two-story model. Low-VOC paints and glues, recycled carpet and an HVAC system without refrigerants were chosen. "We were able to do a lot in the office to make it sustainable," Hesselink said.

The company pursued LEED EB for the building because it wants to be known as LEED EB experts. Nichols sells green cleaning products and using the right products was a natural.

Pobst said other buildings seeking LEED EB certification include the Campau Square Plaza Building at 99 Monroe Ave. in downtown Grand Rapids, a building managed by CB Richard Ellis on behalf of the owner, Westminster Campau LLC. The real estate management company is committed to registering 100 buildings as LEED EB by the end of 2010. "It really captured the imagination of the facility management group as a way of capturing costs and as an effective management tool for a building inventory," Pobst said.

Frey said the West Michigan chapter has a LEED EB market sector interest group that meets monthly.