

LEGALLY SPEAKING: New International Green Construction Code “Sprouting Up” in 2012

By Matthew J. DeVries

No doubt you have heard about LEED®, Green Globes and Energy Star green standards in the United States. There are also state and regional standards such as California’s CALGreen Code and Green Built™ Texas that have made a major impact on both public and private construction. Recently, the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) joined efforts to develop and release the International Green Construction Code (IGCC). The State of Maryland recently passed legislation (effective March 2012) enabling local jurisdictions to adopt the IGCC as a requirement for new construction in that state. Previously, the IGCC was adopted by the State of Rhode Island, the cities of Richland, Washington and Ft. Collins, Colorado, as well as local governments in the State of New Hampshire.

What is the IGCC?

The IGCC was developed to apply to traditional and high-performance buildings that are consistent and coordinated with the international family of codes and standards. The IGCC is applicable to the construction of buildings, structures and systems, including alterations and additions. It serves as a model, enforceable building code in contrast to voluntary rating systems, such as LEED.

The primary organization behind the development of the IGCC is the International Codes Commission (ICC), a nonprofit membership

association that has developed numerous building codes (known as I-Codes) which are applicable to the construction of residential and commercial buildings. The ICC is widely accepted as a leader in this field as evidenced by the fact that I-Codes have been adopted by all 50 states and many federal agencies. Other participants in the process of developing the IGCC are the AIA, ASTM, ASHRAE, USGBC and IES. With the broad participation of such well-established players in the construction industry, it is anticipated that the IGCC will have considerable acceptance and impact in building circles.

IGCC vs. LEED

The IGCC is not intended to compete with or replace LEED or similar green building rating organizations, but instead will complement the efforts of such organizations by providing a baseline mandatory building code. In fact, the USGBC has been one of the leading sponsors of and participants in the process of developing the IGCC. Some key questions for many in the design and construction industry are: What impact will this code have on my project? Will it help me to obtain LEED certification? Or will my clients forgo the expense of certification and just want to meet code?

Status of IGCC

The public process of developing the IGCC began in March of 2010 with the issuance of Version 1.0. Since then, there have been a

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series of comment periods, public hearings, amendments and releases of revised versions of the IGCC. The final public comment deadline was August 12, 2011, the final action hearing is scheduled for November 2-6, 2011 and the anticipated publication date is March of 2012.

Potential Impact of IGCC

The prospect of the wide-spread adoption of an enforceable green building code is seen by many in the construction industry as having the potential to fundamentally change the focus of sustainability in the United States. A statement issued by the AIA predicted that the IGCC could be the biggest development to hit the architectural profession in the last 50 years. Considering the potential impact of the IGCC and the rapidly approaching publication date, you can expect to see more and more commentary and discussion of this major development in the sustainability arena.

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