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## Building “greener”: sooner than later?

Movement toward environmentally conscious design takes shape in new regulations, construction contracts

As the seasons change and a new spring begins, it's easy to notice everything around us starting to turn green. In fact, it seems as if the entire country is turning a slight shade of green. However, this type of green focuses less on color and more on the steps that we are taking to be more environmentally conscious. This cultural shift has taken the country by storm—and the construction industry is no different. Recently, there has been a movement throughout the country towards the adoption and promotion of “green building.” Green building is defined as “the practice of creating healthier and more resource-efficient models of construction, renovation, operation, maintenance and demolition.” This type of building strategy has been linked to several environmental, cultural, and social benefits, yielding a positive impact on the quality of the air and water in a community. These advantages motivate many to join the movement and include reductions in the deterioration of natural resources, lower operating costs for owners of “green buildings,” increased productivity of employees within “green buildings,” and an overall improvement in the quality of life of those occupying green buildings.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) leads the charge along with the U.S. Green Building Council. Specifically, the EPA has worked to promote energy conservation, water management and pollution reduction, as well as other environmental standards for construction. These initiatives are based upon the EPA's “Green Buildings Vision and Policy Statement” which embodies its goal of modeling “responsible environmental behavior” and creating “the framework within which the building industry as a whole can shift towards practices that will promote green buildings.”

The Texas legislature has also gotten in on the game. Specifically, in March and April of 2007, the Energy Resources Committee introduced a bill (still pending) relating to building code standards for energy efficiency performance that officially adopts the International Energy Conservation Code as the standard in Texas for commercial, industrial and residential (except single-family) construction. Additionally, new legislation now requires architects, in order to maintain their license, to devote at least one hour of their mandatory continuing education to sustainable or energy-efficient design standards.

The recent 2007 revisions of AIA Contract Document B-101, the Standard Form of Agreement Between Owner and Architect, is also indicative of this trend toward green building. The B-101 requires the

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architect, during the schematic design phase, to discuss with the owner the feasibility of a green building approach. Specifically, section 3.2.5.1 requires the architect to consider environmentally responsible design alternatives including material choices, building orientation and program aesthetics that are more environmentally conscious, while section 3.2.3 requires the architect to present these options to the owner.

Local governing bodies are also implementing more environmentally conscious building requirements, especially in the area of residential construction. The City of Austin leads the state in the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of its green building program. Austin's program was commenced in 1990 and includes a total of 111 builders who, collectively, have constructed in excess of 2,475 "green homes" to date. The green building program offers training, monthly seminars, support services, plan reviews, one-on-one consultation and marketing support to educate and motivate its builders to participate in the program. Taking this trend one step further, the City of Frisco, Texas, broke new ground when it became one of the only programs in the entire country to require all new residential homes to meet or exceed its Green Building Program's criteria.

From residential to industrial, and every type of construction project in between, members of the construction industry are facing new programs, requirements, rules and laws designed to raise awareness of and, in some extreme cases, require compliance with various green building procedures. The ultimate aim of such programs will hopefully benefit many future generations to come; however, it is important that members of the construction industry pay particular attention to these developments now. As our friends in Frisco have already discovered for themselves, the sweeping changes brought by green building may be felt much sooner in the form of increased regulation of the construction industry.

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