

## Existing Buildings Turn Over a Green Leaf

The LEED-EB certification process can pose challenges, but rewards are significant.

By **G. M. Filisko**

**M**argot Crosman, George Denise and Jose Guevara sound like proud parents when talking about the work they invested transforming their buildings into models of energy efficiency by achieving LEED for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB) certification. They also brag about all the money they've saved and will continue to save over the long run.

But the road they traveled wasn't easy. "It's 90 percent perspiration and 10 percent inspiration," says Denise, general manager at Cushman & Wakefield and manager of the four-building Adobe Systems facilities in San Jose.

"Challenging" and "a lot of paperwork" are how Crosman, general manager of Unico Properties' 100 Pine Street in San Francisco, describes the certification process. Guevara, a Cushman & Wakefield property manager who oversees the Post Montgomery Center in San Francisco, which is awaiting final certification, adds "painful" and "labor-intensive" to the lexicon.

LEED-EB certification involves evaluating and improving nearly all the major functions in a building, including the site's



**Above:** Unico Properties' 100 Pine, the first multi-tenant building in California to receive LEED-EB Certification

sustainability, water efficiency, energy use, materials, indoor-air quality and innovative operations techniques. Certification is a three-stage process. First, the building's performance is measured in each of the above mentioned categories. A major component of that measurement is an evaluation of the site's energy use during a performance period of three to 24 months. After that sustainable practices are implemented in as many categories as possible and again scored on the building's performance in each category. Finally, the results are submitted to the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), which uses a point system to determine whether buildings meet the requirements for basic, silver, gold or platinum certification.

"It's a pretty complicated system," says Crosman, "but you look at a number of categories—such as water efficiency, energy and atmosphere and materials and resources—and must have a minimum score. The higher your score, the more points you're eligible for."

"The major components for any property to achieve a LEED standard are a waste diversion—or recycling—program, a green cleaning program and a green purchasing program," says Guevara. "With those three components, most buildings should be able to certify, and it would be a no-cost or low-cost implementation."

Implementation at the Post Montgomery Building was even better than a no-cost effort—it actually saved money. "We went through a retrocommissioning process that cost \$173,000," explains Guevara. "A building consultant inspected all our operating systems to ensure they were functioning as designed, and that the set points were at maximum efficiency. That process reduced our utility bills by \$189,000."

Getting owners to make that initial investment is one of the most difficult steps of achieving LEED certification. "You have to convince your ownership

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to spend money and to implement measures that basically aren't required," says Guevara. "That's a gamble, but you learn it's an investment, not an expense. That's hard for owners to grasp."

"There's definitely been some hesitation among owners," says Bandi Caro, an office leasing associate at TRI Commercial in San Francisco. "They're questioning how much they'll get out of it, because LEED is new, and there aren't many reports of the cost basis and how efficient those properties are."

That, however, isn't stopping more owners from seeking LEED-EB status. The 48-story office tower at 101 California, the 23-story office and retail property at 455 Market and the 48-story office and retail Transamerica Pyramid at 600 Montgomery are now pursuing certification, according to Guevara.

Tenants don't have to front any money when their building seeks certification, but getting their buy-in can be a challenge. "Some are extremely excited and want to know what they can do to improve sustainable practices," says Guevara. "Others are excited but don't get involved. The final third consider it an imposition. We had to arm-wrestle them to convince them to do it. But it goes well, because they have no choice."

The heaviest involvement for most tenants is participation in the recycling program. Even that can be a tug-of-war. "We're not asking them to do anything outlandish, just waste diversion," says Guevara. At the Post Montgomery, the building's waste management company conducts trash audits, rifling through the rubbish to find evidence of tenants that aren't following protocol. "There's always something in the trash that has a floor, an office number or a name on it," says Guevara. "We ask those tenants in a nice way to comply. It does take some effort."

At Adobe Systems, Denise oversaw the implementation of 64 energy-improvement projects in a five-year span. "We spent \$1.4 million on those projects," he says, "and we reduced our operating costs by \$1.2 million a year."

Included were fees for consultants to shepherd Denise's team through the certification process. "You can do this on your own," he says. "But if it's not what you normally do as your profession, it'll take you more time, and chances are your time will be as valuable as the consultant's. You also get an extra point if you use LEED accredited professionals, because the USGBC wants the process to go as smoothly as it can, so people don't get frustrated and drop out."

"I wouldn't call the process labor intensive in terms of operations," adds Denise. "I'd call it that in terms of the administrative burden. There's a lot of paperwork involved in good building management, and this is an extra burden. I'd guess my team put in 500 extra hours to get LEED-EB certification. But we definitely got a return on that investment." ■



**Top to bottom:**  
Jose Guevara at Crocker Galleria  
Exterior of Post Montgomery Center  
Dan Geiger of USGBC-NCC recently  
presented Margot Crosman of Unico  
Properties the plaque for LEED-EB  
Certification for 100 Pine