



Living Building Challenge Version 2 Released

The International Living Building Institute (ILBI) and the Cascadia Region Green Building Council released version 2 of the Living Building Challenge at Greenbuild 2009 in Phoenix.

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Photo: Gregory Edwards

One of the most forward-thinking green building certification programs in the world is the Living Building Challenge. The Living Building Challenge is a product of the International Living Building Institute (ILBI) and the Cascadia Region Green Building Council. At this week's Greenbuild 2009, version two of the [Living Building Challenge](#) program was released.

The Living Building Challenge program goes beyond the brick and mortar of a building and examines the social and economic issues that the nation is currently facing. The new version meshes urban agriculture, social equity, and Universal Design into the certification program.

More people are living in urban areas now than at any other point in the world's history. Version two of the Living Building Challenge addresses this shift in habitation and actually requires the use of onsite urban agriculture programs. This requirement changes depending on how suburban a given site is. The more suburban the site is, the more required agriculture space is needed in order to qualify for Living Building Challenge certification.



With the new requirements, the ILBI hopes that a car-free lifestyle is available to more citizens, even those living in suburban areas. Jason F. McLennan, CEO of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council explains that the Living Building Challenge goes beyond simply requiring energy efficient buildings with a smaller carbon footprint.

“The simple concept of green buildings has generally produced more efficient buildings and smaller footprints. But that is no longer enough,” says McLennan. “With version 2.0 addressing issues of food, transportation and social justice, we expect a considerable leap forward will happen once again.” Source: [ILBI](#) (PDF)

Although LEED v3 requires [performance data reporting](#) as part of ongoing certification, the Living Building Challenge has always required performance data prior to certification. Projects pursuing certification need to have a minimum of one year of performance data available.

The Living Building Challenge v2 is broken into several petals (categories): site, water, energy, health, materials, equity, and beauty. A brief breakdown of the petals follows.

Site

- Limits to growth – only projects built on greyfields or brownfields are allowed.
- Urban agriculture – The minimum level of dedicated agricultural space is based on a project's Floor Area Ratio (FAR) with only the densest urban environments being exempted from a mandatory urban agriculture space.
- Habitat exchange – A 1:1 ratio of developed space to protected habitat must be met.
- Car-free living – The focus should be on pedestrian-oriented communities, both for commercial and residential projects.

Water

- Net-zero water – Water must come through onsite precipitation capture or closed-loop water systems.
- Ecological water flow – Discharged water should either be captured for reuse onsite or managed in a natural way.

Energy

- Net-zero energy – All of a project's energy needs must be met through onsite renewable energy generation.

Health

- Civilized environment – All occupied spaces must have working windows.
- Healthy air – A variety of measures must be met to ensure that indoor air quality is at a premium level.
- Biophilia – Six different design elements need to be implemented in every 2,000 square-meters of project space.

Materials

- Red List – None of the materials on the Red List may be used in a project seeking Living Building Challenge certification.
- Embodied Carbon Footprint – Carbon offsets need to be used.

- Responsible Industry – FSC or onsite harvested wood (cleared purely for construction purposes) needs to be used.
- Appropriate Sourcing – Locally sourced materials are optimal however the Living Building Challenge program designates the maximum source distance for a variety of material types.
- Conservation + Reuse – Waste reduction and landfill diversion requirements are strong, including a 100% diversion rate for soil and biomass.

Equity

- Human Scale + Humane Places – This requirement focuses on creating a human-scaled place as opposed to an automobile-scaled place.
- Democracy + Social Justice – All areas should be universally accessible. This petal subset also covers the importance of affordable housing.
- Rights to Nature – This covers the right to fresh air, sunlight, and natural waterways.

Beauty

- Beauty + Spirit – In addition to all of the above-listed criteria, projects must have elements that are meant solely for human aesthetic pleasure.
- Inspiration + Education – What better place to learn about a living building than inside one? The Living Building Challenge requires onsite, publicly accessible educational materials.

Although the Living Building Challenge is quite a bit different from the USGBC LEED certification system, buildings can achieve both LEED and Living Building Challenge certification. One building that is working on both certification programs is the [Omega Center for Sustainable Living](#) (OCSL).

The Living Building Challenge program embraces a change that is happening in the green building industry – the importance of a building’s impact on the people in the building in addition to the environment around the building.

Photo: Andy Milford

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