

The New LEED AP+ Exam

Just when you thought it was safe to go in the water again ... Say, you're studying for the LEED AP exam or you just recently passed the exam and can now call yourself a LEED Accredited Professional, or LEED AP. The new program that the USGBC unveiled on Thursday November 20th at Greenbuild in Boston, in effect, reduces your status to "Legacy."

Now don't stop studying for the exam, because the new exam is still under development. Beta test versions of the exam for LEED for Homes and LEED O & M (Operations and Maintenance – formerly called LEED EB, for Existing Buildings) will be available for taking in February 2009. The USGBC will be presenting workshops for the new exam in November 2009 at the next Greenbuild conference in Phoenix. There is an entirely new, two-part exam, as well as a new set of requirements that must be met in order to stay on the cusp of LEED accreditation. This new initiative must be viewed in the perspective of other organizations serving design professionals and what their certification/ registration programs encompass.

The LEED accreditation program was begun in February 2001 by the United States Green Building Council. At that time, the exam was based on LEED Version 2.0, which was introduced in 2000, as a Pilot Program. The program took on greater focus after Version 2.1 was released in 2003 and then, finally, Version 2.2 (the current version) was released in 2005. There are now over 62,000 LEED Accredited Professionals. You can become accredited in any of the areas for which there is a reference guide: New Construction and Major Renovations, Existing Buildings, Core and Shell, and Commercial Interiors. LEED Homes has been released but there is not an exam available, yet.

All LEED Reference Guides will be harmonized next year. In other words, certain parts of the standards will be constant, others will vary. In addition, regional features will be added and greater value will be given to Regional Credits earned. The standards will be updated every two years, so that there will be a 2009 version, 2011, 2013, etc.

The USGBC staff responsible for LEED Accreditation had not considered renewal fees, different tracks for different construction industry segments, and credential maintenance.

The USGBC looked at the model that other professional Societies and organizations had spearheaded. Of course the state education departments regulate a fee structure for licensed professionals. AIA has no exam-based certifications available. The Construction Specifications Institute, however, has - over the last 20-25 years – developed its own signature Certification program.

The CSI Model

CSI was started in 1947 by government architect/ spec writers in Washington D.C. and New York City and had started out championing concise, "stream-lined" specifications. In 1964 they introduced MasterFormat the system for organizing construction information. They developed a certification exam system that has been around since the early 1980's. In 1988, when I took the exam, there were two exams available: the Construction Document Technologist (CDT), which

was a two hour/ 100 question test and the Certified Construction Specifier (CCS) exam. The CCS exam was originally a four hour essay exam. They have, since added two Professional Exams: Certified Construction Contract Administrator (CCCA) and Certified Construction product representative (CCPR). All three professional exams are 4 hour/ 200 question exams.

USGBC/ GBCI Reaction

The new LEED process is becoming, like CSI's system, a two-tiered system for professionals and support people. In CSI's case one can just take and pass the CDT exam and become a Construction Document Technologist. After passing that exam the candidate goes on to take the professional exams (either CCS, CCCA, or CCPR) and. Originally you could take both exams the same day. Now you must take them sequentially at two separate sittings. GBCI has the old LEED AP category. If you not take the new two-part LEED exam within the next 2-1/2 years – you are forbidden from ever taking the exam. If you pay the \$50.00 biannual renewal fee, you can still be a LEED AP for the rest of your life.

There is going to be a new exam for the “LEED Green Associate” category and another, harder exam for the “LEED AP+” category. There will be another category, LEED Fellow – but nothing has been worked out yet, in that regard. As the USGBCI says: “It is far too important a title to go rushing into without careful consideration.” (Paraphrased)

Here are some key concepts that one should keep in mind regarding the LEED exams. You must be working or have worked on a Green Building Project in order to be qualify as a LEED AP+. To qualify for the LEED Green Associate, you must “demonstrate or document involvement in support of LEED projects. In this writer's opinion, read that to mean “sales reps” and “developers” and pass the Part A of the exam. Candidates for the LEED AP+ may take both exams at the same sitting. Bear in mind that you must pass both to call yourself a LEED AP+.

Oh and did I forget to mention, one must now subject him or herself to credential management. Associates will need 15 hours and LEED Accredited Professionals will need 30 hours. Oh, don't worry Legacy LEED AP's aren't required to have any!

If your firm is a member of USGBC the exam and applications fee and exam fee will be \$350.00, if your firm is not a member – the fee will be \$500.00. The fee for LEED Green Associates is \$150.00 and \$250.00 less, respectively.

In terms of timetable, the new exam will not be introduced until after LEED 2009 is completed. LEED Homes and LEED Operations and Maintenance is slated for release early next year (January of February) and the replacement for LEED for New Construction and Major Renovations (NC), version 2.2 is slated for release this summer.

Go to the Green Building Certification Institute website for more information:

<http://www.gbci.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CMSPageID=84>