

# Residential Green Building Standards – LEED vs. ANSI

By Sean Davis, Morris & Ritchie Associates

**G**reen is here to stay. This is not a passing fad. In almost every conversation regarding development, “green” is raised. One cannot pick up a magazine or trade journal without running across more than one article and multiple advertisements about green standards and products.

For the last several years, the focus has been on non-residential vertical construction. Now, at one of the most difficult times in the history of our industry, the target is squarely on the homebuilder. One’s personal or professional opinion regarding this subject is no longer relevant – we must incorporate green into our communities and our homes in order to survive and prosper.

The path to green is not clear. There are multiple standards that can be applied to determine if your home is green. So which path should one take? What “certification” should you pursue? And finally, what does the future hold for our industry, and how can we help shape its requirements?

Two rating systems have risen to the top for the single family detached and single family attached (town home) builder to consider, LEED for Homes and the National Green Building Standards ICC 700 – 2008 (a.k.a. the ANSI or American National Standards Institute Standard).

LEED for Homes went through an exhaustive development and review process by a cadre of experts and became effective in January 2008. There are eight categories to consider: Innovations & Design Process; Locations & Linkages; Sustainable Sites; Water Efficiency; Energy & Atmosphere; Materials & Resources; Indoor Environmental Quality; and Education & Awareness. There are a total of 136 “points” available in these eight categories. To become “certified,” one needs to garner 45 points. The more points above 45, the higher the certification. Plans and construction must be evaluated by a LEED for Home Provider. A list of Providers and a wealth of information is contained on the U.S. Green Building Council’s Website at [www.usgbc.org/leed/homes](http://www.usgbc.org/leed/homes).

The ANSI Standard is new. The National Association of Homebuilders, in conjunction with the American National Standards Institute and the International Code Council, worked on this Standard for several years. NAHB’s Green Building Guidelines, in use since 2005, were the starting point for the Standard that was adopted in January 2009. Homes are judged in six categories: Lot Design, Preparation and Development; Resource Efficiency; Energy Efficiency; Water Efficiency; Indoor Environmental Quality; and Operation, Maintenance and Building Owner Education. Additional points are given based on local criteria. In addition, there are mandatory requirements that must be met. There is a point system, similar to LEED for Homes, which ranges from 222 to 697. NAHB Research Center trained Verifiers review and rate homes for designation under the ANSI Standard. To understand the ANSI Standard in greater detail, visit NAHB’s website at [www.nahbgreen.com](http://www.nahbgreen.com).

Both programs cost money and require time to review and approve a home. There has been criticism of the LEED program’s cost and timing. This is in part due to the overwhelming number of applications for designation. The ANSI Standard is new, and only time will tell how costs and timing compare to the LEED program.

It is essential that one of these two programs becomes the standard for the homebuilding industry. Otherwise, there will always be uncertainty as to what is the appropriate—or best—standard. Homebuilding is different from other vertical construction. Yes, there are similar trades and building materials, but a home is different from a retail center, or an office, or an institutional building. The NAHB has embraced and advocated for the homebuilding industry since its inception. As green products and techniques evolve, the NAHB will be in the best position to understand how to apply these standards within the homebuilding industry. In addition, the NAHB will be in the best position to monitor both the overall system (from a national perspective) and local programs (from Home Builder Associations such as MNCBIA) over time. For these reasons, and more, the ANSI standards could become the industry benchmark.

Finally, it is important to point out that the USGBC is currently promulgating the LEED Neighborhood Design Standard. The draft can be found on the USGBC’s Website. Homebuilders (and their affiliated HBAs) should carefully review this Standard, as it will become effective soon. Although it primarily governs community design, its impact on homebuilders will be felt at local planning commissions or county/city council hearings. Homes are always part of a larger community. ■

*Sean Davis is a Principal at Morris & Ritchie Associates, an affiliate of Geo-Technology Associates, Inc. He can be contacted at [sdavis@mragta.com](mailto:sdavis@mragta.com).*

