

The Future is Green

The green writing is on the wall and pretty much everywhere else in buildings.

This was the clear and succinct message from the Green Building Council of South Africa's (GBCSA) inaugural conference held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) from 2-4 November 2008.

Delegates and experts from all over the world attended the conference that set the tone for South Africa's green building future, but a particularly telling sign of the amount of interest in this trend was the large number of local stakeholders that were present.

Rick Fedrizzi, president of the US Green Building Council and keynote speaker at the conference, painted an alarming yet compelling picture of the reasons behind the momentum of the global green building movement.

"Forty percent of all the greenhouse emissions stem from buildings, and not from cars as many people would assume. Buildings are therefore the largest source of greenhouse emissions in the world.

"Moreover, cities around the world are growing exponentially and the end-result could be devastating if something isn't done.

"The current financial crisis has created a situation where lots of new companies want to get on board with green principles, not only because it's the right thing to do but because it will make financial sense in the future. However, nothing will succeed without the business case," he said.

Most importantly, a much-anticipated green building rating system and set of guidelines were announced at the conference to provide an incentive for SA companies to build and occupy green buildings.

The GBCSA developed Green Star SA – Office tool, based on the Green Building Council of Australia's (GBCA) Green Star rating system. Its purpose is to assess the environmental hallmarks of new commercial office buildings as well as major base building refurbishments of existing office buildings in South Africa.

A pilot version was launched earlier this year and ran until 1 September 2008 and a significant amount of feedback was received. The GBCSA collated and incorporated all the feedback and the official rating tool was released as Version 1 (v1) at the conference.

The objectives of this rating tool are to establish a common language and standard of measurement for green buildings, promote integrated whole-building design, raise awareness of green building windfalls, recognise environmental leadership and lessen the environmental impact of development.

The tool includes nine categories which serve as criteria for the grading of buildings. These categories include management, indoor environment quality, energy, transport, water, minerals, land use and ecology, emissions and innovations.

"The tool was designed to be technologically robust, thorough and applicable to SA," Jason Buch, technical manager at GBCSA, told Property24.

There was also a strong focus on the role of energy, with Don Winston, director of technical services at The Durst Organisation, Inc., presenting a case study on the Bank of America Tower at One Bryant Park in New York, while Paul Carew, director at PJCarew Consulting, spoke about the energy rating factors coming into play with the Green Star SA tool.

Various SA green building case studies were also presented by local experts such as Anya van der Merwe Miszewski, who spoke on the expansion of the CTICC's second phase.

Prof. Vivian Loftness from the Carnegie Mellon University School of Architecture gave her motivations for building environmentally sustainable buildings in order to enhance productivity and health. Ché Wall, a co-founder of the GBCA, outlined why rating tools are key to transforming the building industry and moving it into a green direction.