

Irrigation Efficiency Management And LEED Certification

By: John Murphy

IA Member

LI # 5896

jmurphy@silversandservices.com

We are discussing LEED Certification and some of the steps clients utilize in the LEED Certification application process. We are also exploring our role as Licensed Irrigators related to LEED Certification.

During a recent interview, Johnny Madison, a 40 year Veteran in the Irrigation Industry stated:

“I am familiar with LEED. It is a good program with great potential for water conservation. The only drawback to the program is the lack of awareness and understanding of the program and what it can do. I feel there is a future for the Irrigation Industry in LEED Certification, if the contractors, owners and developers will get on board.”

The Irrigation Industry, like most industries, uses abbreviations and acronyms. Some of our more common ones are DU (Distribution Uniformity), ET (Evapotranspiration), MP (Matched Precipitation) and VAN (the Variable Adjustable Nozzle) just to name a few. We are comfortable with them.

Let's step out of our comfort zone to recognize a few new ones that most of us have not used yet.

First, the USGBC, the letters stand for the United States Green Building Council, a third party organization that provides education, training and establishes the standards for LEED Certification

Now let's look at the actual acronym LEED, which is the abbreviation for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a process of reporting, inspection and review of a building to implement a plan for ensuring high performance. LEED involves a rating system for the certification of many facets of a facility.

Also of equal importance and easy to confuse with the USGBC is the GBCI. They are the Green Building Certification Institute, which is recognized as the leading third party agency for testing and training of individuals that achieve credentials in the LEED process, such as a Green Associate or a LEED AP.

There are credits available in new construction; there are also credits available for existing buildings, under application for certification.

LEED Certification starts when your client builds a design team and begins an application process. There is a measurable set of credits for many facets of the facility. Goals are set to achieve these credits within a point system. At this point an initial scorecard can be created. There are credits available for irrigation efficiency and for reduction in use of potable water for irrigation.

We can be instrumental in documenting the system capabilities. Is their system metered or sub metered? What are their velocity flows and pressure readings? What have been the actual run times? We help establish the data to be used as a baseline.

Next, we play a vital role assisting the architect and the manager as they review the methods for possible reduction of water use. We provide expertise regarding drip irrigation, smart controllers and Irrigation Efficiency Management. We step up and perform the needed irrigation audits. When the application process is underway, we are needed to help keep the records of the monthly monitoring.

We will need to break some old habits and become more attentive to loss of water on sites. We will need to increase the detail within our proposals and provide more documentation on each project that we service.

During an interview with Mike Cocayne, another industry veteran, Mike stated:

“The biggest change over the past few years is people starting to understand water conservation. The people in the industry that continue to keep making these types of changes are the ones that will make it”

As we begin to evaluate irrigation systems for the LEED credits, we will learn to refine our client’s goals and research deeper into the shortcomings of each particular irrigation system. We will increase our understanding of budget considerations and have the opportunity to qualify the client’s level of commitment.

There is a lot of information currently about ET Management, sustainability and reduced use. Do your own research and clearly define each individual clients water management needs. Let’s be careful not to use a blanket approach and thoroughly discern the client’s needs and the most logical approach to their individual property.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln:

“Better to remain silent and thought a fool, than to speak out and remove all doubt”

Some of the changes we will incur through our commitment to LEED will be going paperless; realizing depth through our organization with recycling and site documentation. We will learn to provide submittals and create audits with cover letters that contain our Irrigation Seal. We will electronically provide (web based) access to irrigation reports, cut sheets and specifications records.

The Opportunities are unprecedented. We get to strengthen our relationships with clients, engineers and architects while providing additional service and support. At the same time we will provide the modifications, the smart controllers and the drip irrigation.

Let's recap.

The USGBC is growing and LEED is a thriving certification process. There is an important arena involving irrigation. We can play a vital role. Sales opportunities do exist and the future of this industry does mean change.

Let's team up and embrace this unprecedented evolution...