

Improve Your Peanut Butter

Our hands make the world real. Our sense of touch is more directly connected to the images in our heads than even our eyes. They will always connect us with our world. Bigger, better, more efficient technologies may help create bigger, better, more efficient buildings, but hands ultimately create the reality we live in. Consider construction as a peanut butter sandwich. If the bread is the technology of building, people are the peanut butter holding it together. We all know the sandwich won't be that great without the best peanut butter! In fact, if it is bad and we feed it to a client we may just be facing some unwanted liability! We need to remember in these days of rapidly changing technologies that the future of construction isn't just in technology; it is also in the people using those technologies.

Finding the right people can be as easy as looking to your payroll. You already employ highly skilled, motivated workers, some young and some older than the rest. The skills and the knowledge they already have can be made even more valuable with some updating to their mental toolboxes. New certifications and labels require people that know how to get things done efficiently and properly. Implementing the newest materials and processes is exciting and full of promise, but it can be full of headaches too, particularly if everyone is as new as the material. Invest in your company's future by investing in continued education.

Green labelling and certifications are gaining popularity at an impressive rate. The day may fast be approaching where you will be required to build to new green standards if you want to get the work. However, there are only so many people who truly understand what the new standards are and

what they mean to the construction process. Some of these labels may soon be incorporated into building and safety codes. The "green thing" is quickly becoming the "construction thing". LEED is expanding with certifications for homes, neighbourhood development, schools, libraries, medical facilities and laboratories. Building Codes will continue to eye energy efficiency into the future. Ratings like energyStar and energuide are being looked at as new standards in construction. Ensuring that you understand what the labels and certifications are and what they mean to your company will be beneficial to you and your clients. However, new labels mean making new promises to your clients. You also need to understand the risks involved. Don't play catch up when you can easily get ahead. Depending on the label you or your clients choose there can be different risks and responsibilities that will land on different shoulders. No matter which label you seek, there are a few things to keep in mind and some new considerations to make, not least of which will be finding the skilled workers to accomplish the new standards.

Training requirements are going to be different, and the costs of the training will vary as well. Take some time to look at the leading programs. Check which are most applicable to your company, particularly if yours is a specialized company. Know what you're getting into and what is coming. Certifications, like becoming a LEED AP (Accredited Professional), are open to a majority of disciplines within the construction industry including contractors and sub trades. Having a certified worker isn't required but not having one can open you up to new liabilities. With LEED, for example, just having an AP on staff can

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earn you an additional point. That same AP will also help limit your exposure to risk with an increased knowledge of expectations and requirements. Bids will be more accurate and profitable with a better understanding of what exactly you're bidding on. BuiltGreen will award a point for each trade that has completed the BuiltGreen program. No matter what training program you enrol in, you're going to get more out of it than you think. Check with your local associations to see which programs they are promoting, but remember to ask them why they promote that particular one. Having more than one employee in more than one program will increase your ability to work in green construction. One project might be a LEED project, and the other could be a BuiltGreen project. With a variety of certifications earned you can bid on a wider variety of projects, with a greater understanding of what you're bidding on. Training will help you and your workers understand what you're promising when you offer to build "green" and what will be expected. Properly trained workers will help protect you from exposure.

There will definitely be new areas of liability with green projects. You can take a couple approaches to reviewing the contracts. The best is a co-operative one; agree with the client that you'll work with them to achieve the highest rating possible. Be aware of the legal implications and liabilities of promising a level of certification at the outset of a project that might not be achievable. In your contract make it clear who has responsibility for what. If you're not sure, ask before you agree to or promise anything. All green building labels require an increased level of project management and documentation. Increased management needs to be reflected in your contracts too. Work with your clients to make sure you're both protected and aware of what is achievable. Knowing who is liable can avoid adding extra legal costs after construction is complete. Most important, remember the peanut butter and educate your workers on how to meet the requirements of your green project before you take it on.

PROVINCE SEEKS INPUT ON ADAPTABLE HOUSING STANDARDS

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development is looking for input on adaptable housing standards designed to benefit people with limited mobility.

The proposal provides adaptable housing standards that would be included during construction of new residential, multi-unit buildings. Creating adaptable suites means that accessibility features can be added more easily and inexpensively to the home after construction. For example, the proposed standards would provide extra reinforcement in bathroom walls to allow grab bars to be installed if needed later. Also included in the proposed standards are: wider doorways; accessible entranceways; and easy-to-use light switches, door handles, faucets and other hardware. Adaptable housing features are intended to benefit anyone whose mobility is limited due to age, disability, illness or accident

by making it easier for them to function more independently in their home.

Representatives from the building industry, local government, and health care and seniors' groups helped guide development of the proposed standards. The model standards, which local governments can choose to adopt through bylaw, would apply to new multi-unit residential buildings with single storey suites. The proposals can be reviewed and commented on at www.housing.gov.bc.ca/building/publicreviewadaptableHousing.htm.

The deadline for commenting on the proposed standards is Sept. 22, 2008.



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