Global Sustainable Buildings Guide - China

Green Certification

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# Is there a nationally adopted and recognized form of certification for buildings? What is it and is it mandatory for all new buildings and refurbished buildings?

\* Full list of cited regulations at the end of this chapter.

Under China’s national regime, there are four levels of certifications for green buildings (in ascending order of quality requirements): Basic Grade, 1-Star Grade, 2-Star Grade and 3-Star Grade.

The current green building certification regime in China is mainly based on the following regulation and evaluation standard:

2019 Green Building Evaluation Standard\* (Note: The first version of this standard was issued in 2006; draft revisions to the current version are now under public consultation.)

2021 Green Building Label Management Measures\*

These documents coexist and cross-interact with many other regulatory documents and technical standards governing construction planning, design, safety, conservation of energy and other resources, and measures to combat climate change and reach decarbonization. Some of the documents will be discussed below.

Over the years, many projects in China have also applied for other internationally recognized green building certifications, most notably, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification launched by the US Green Building Council.

As of the first half of 2022, more than 25,000 projects have been certified under the current green building regime.

Under China’s current green building certification regime:

The 3-Star Grade is to be granted by the national building authority, i.e., the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD).

The other certification grades (Basic Grade, 1-Star Grade and 2-Star Grade) can be granted by the local building authorities. In addition, the local authorities may make certain adjustments to the evaluation standards applicable to the lower certification grades.

While all types of buildings are now eligible to apply for a green building certificate and label, it is still not a nationwide mandatory requirement. Specifically:

Under the 2013 Green Building Work Plan\*, only certain new government-invested buildings, affordable housing in certain cities and large-scale public buildings over 20,000 square meters must attain a green building certification.

Under the Urban and Rural Construction Area Carbon Peaking Implementation Plan\* and the Building Energy Conservation and Green Building Development Plan during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period\*, China targets that all new buildings in China shall attain at least the Basic Grade rating and at least 30% of them reaching at least 1-Star rating by 2025.

Local regulations may set higher requirements and mandate all new buildings to attain green building certification. For example, under the Shenzhen Green Building Regulation\*, from 1 July 2022, all new buildings in Shenzhen must attain a 1-Star rating, and all new government-invested projects must attain no lower than 2-Star rating.

A green building rating label is to be granted after construction is completed. (Note: A project owner can apply for a pre-assessment for a green building label during the construction design stage)

The current assessment criteria under the 2019 Green Building Evaluation Standard are grouped under the following building aspects:

Safety and durability

Health and comfort

Occupancy convenience

Conservation of resources

Environmental habitability

Overall, more consideration is now given to various green building aspects, such as the project’s adaption to the climatic and physical environment and users’ comfort and convenience.

Under the above-mentioned national regulations and certain local regulations, if buildings are mandated to obtain green building certification but fail to obtain the required certification, it could result in the relevant buildings not being allowed to be put into use and/or other regulatory sanctions.

Under the 2019 Green Building Evaluation Standard, the relevant energy conservation standards are still mainly expressed in terms of energy consumption intensity, but the standard requires that there be specific reporting on carbon emission intensity if the project intends to apply for green financing. In addition, if the project owners calculate the buildings’ carbon emission intensity and adopt measures to lower the emission intensity, it will help the relevant buildings obtain a higher rating.

China has enacted the following technical standards for calculating and prescribing carbon emission intensity of buildings:

2019 Building Carbon Emissions Calculation Standard\*

2021 General Rules for Building Energy Conservation and Use of Renewable Energy (“2021 General Rules”)\*

In February 2023, the MOHURD published draft revisions to the 2019 Green Building Evaluation Standard\* for public comments. The draft revisions aim to align the 2019 Green Building Evaluation Standard with the 2021 General Rules and to include more specific provisions in relation to carbon emissions. For example, building owners must specify the buildings’ carbon emission intensity and their proposed measures to reduce this carbon emission intensity to obtain a 1-Star rating or above.

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