Global Sustainable Buildings Guide - United States of America

Green Certification

| Contents |
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| To generate table of contents, right-click here and select **Update Field.** |

# 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?

There are no nationally adopted or mandated building certifications in the US. Any such certifications are typically handled at a municipal level. Below are examples of private and nonprofit green building certification programs that exist in the marketplace, as well as examples of other standards and policies promoting green buildings.

Two of the most commonly used rating systems in the US are as follows:

1. [The US Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification program](http://www.usgbc.org/leed). This certification program recognizes best-in-class building strategies and practices. Building projects must satisfy prerequisites and earn points to achieve different levels of LEED certification. Prerequisites and credits differ for each rating system, and teams select the targeted rating system based on the unique needs of the building and the project type. The six rating systems applicable to specific project types are (i) building design and construction, (ii) interior design and construction, (iii) building operations and maintenance, (iv) neighborhood development, (v) homes, and (vi) cities.

The LEED certificates are being updated with respect to projects registered after 1 March 2024. These updates raise thresholds for energy performance and emission reductions. Further, a new greenhouse gas emissions metric has been added.

2. The Green Building Initiative's [Green Globes Certification](http://www.thegbi.org/green-globes-certification/). This is a web-based program for green building guidance and certification, which includes an on-site assessment by a third party. It is a three-in-one certification that evaluates the environmental sustainability, health and wellness, and resilience of all types of commercial real estate. The program aims to advance the overall environmental performance and sustainability of commercial buildings, with modules supporting new construction, existing buildings, existing healthcare buildings and their interiors. They work to (i) reduce operating costs, (ii) qualify for tax incentives, (iii) meet government regulations, (iv) attract and retain employees and (v) increase a property's marketability. Green Globes criteria is built around and incorporated hundreds of other consensus documents such as those from the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning (ASHRAE), International Code Council (ICC), and International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO).

While the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) does not have a green building certification program, the EPA and US Department of Energy's [ENERGY STAR](http://www.energystar.gov/about/) ® addresses the energy aspects of green buildings, qualifying new and renovated buildings as energy efficient and then awarding them with the ENERGY STAR® label. It is a voluntary program that helps businesses and individuals save money and protect the environment through superior energy efficiency. The program aims to promote cost-effective, relevant, and high-quality energy efficiency solutions, with emphasis on testing, third-party reviews, and compliance screening. Certifications are available for products, homes, commercial buildings, and industrial plants, each with a specific set of requirements and qualification procedures.

The EPA references the two rating systems referenced above, together with the International Green Construction Code, the Standard for the Design of High-Performance Green Buildings Except Low-Rise Residential Buildings, the National Green Building Standard and the Living Building Challenge. See [Green Building Standards | US EPA](https://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/green-building-standards) for a comparison of these standards.

Further, the EPA promotes greener products and services with its [sustainable marketplace](https://www.epa.gov/greenerproducts).

The ASHRAE also develops [standards and guidelines](https://www.ashrae.org/technical-resources/standards-and-guidelines) related to (i) refrigeration processes and (ii) the design and maintenance of indoor environments. ASHRAE writes standards for the purpose of establishing a consensus for (i) methods of testing for use in commerce and (ii) performance criteria for use as facilitators to guide the industry. Consensus standards are developed and published to define minimum values or acceptable performance.

The US General Services Administration (GSA) promotes government-wide efforts to combat the climate crisis and spur the creation of good jobs and stimulates clean energy industries by revitalizing federal sustainability. The GSA has issued the [Leasing Desk Guide](https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/real-estate-services/leasing/leasing-policy), which outlines leasing policies and procedures.

Other areas of focus identified by the GSA for [Climate Action and Sustainability](https://www.gsa.gov/climate-action-and-sustainability?footer=gsa#buildings) are net-zero design, green roofs, the Green Proving Ground program, the Sustainable Facilities Tool and sustainable building initiatives.

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