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April 13, 2010 2:15 pm | 2 Comments

# NBA LEEDing the way

The NBA becomes a pioneer with its LEED-certified arenas.

by [Kyle Stack](#) / [@NYSportswriter](#)

The NBA's Green Week from April 1-9 highlighted numerous environmental conservation efforts around the league, but no announcement carried more weight than what came from Portland.

It was during the Trail Blazers' April 9 game that they earned a LEED Gold rating from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) for their arena, the Rose Garden.

Literally living up to its nickname, the team became the first major professional sports team to earn a Gold

rating on January 25; they waited until the NBA officially celebrated its week of 'green' conservation efforts to recognize the award.

"We wanted to show leadership and innovation in an area where it hasn't been contemplated," said Chris Oxley, general manager of the Rose Quarter, which oversees the 15-year-old Rose Garden and the adjacent Memorial Coliseum.

Even though the Blazers were the first major pro sports team to reach Gold, they weren't the first to become LEED-approved. The Atlanta Hawks (Phillips Arena) and Miami Heat (AmericanAirlines Arena) took that honor by achieving LEED Certification just hours apart in April 2009. No other major sports league can claim three teams that play in LEED buildings.

Attaining LEED recognition is no walk in the park. The building rating system — it stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — tracks productivity in six categories: Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality and Innovation and Design.

Any organization or company attempting to secure LEED status for its building receives a certain number of points for meeting various requirements under each category. The final point tally determines what level is achieved: Certified, Silver, Gold or Platinum.

In order to receive Gold status for the Rose Garden, the Trail Blazers had to ensure the arena was chockfull of features.

They include the team subsidizing transit passes for staff members to use at the Rose Quarter, an area which takes the same name of the group which oversees the Rose Garden and which serves as a primary public transportation hub for Portlanders. The Blazers determined that more than 30 percent of attendees to events at their arena choose public or alternative transportation.

With bike access, two light rail lines nearby and a street car line that will be completed just north of the arena in the next couple of years, the subsidization idea was a no-brainer. "We're completely surrounded by public transportation access," Oxley said.



Recycling and composting are also taken seriously, which can be noted by the 200,000 tons of food that is composted every year. The Blazers and Rose Quarter are so committed to the endeavors that they

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designed their own recycling containers, 150 of which were unveiled at the Blazers game April 9 with 100 more on the way in the next several weeks. Each container has four smaller bins with garbage, food, paper and glass among the products that can be tossed into it.

The Blazers and Rose Quarter management were unhappy with the containers they researched on the open market, so they took it upon themselves to design one in-house and they found a local manufacturer to produce them.

"The containers are recycled and when we're done with them they go right back to the same facility that manufactured them," Oxley said. "They'll go into the shredder and be made into something else."

As mentioned above, the Blazers aren't the only team taking energy conservation seriously. The Hawks help Phillips Arena save \$60,000-\$80,000 per year in water costs by using low-flow shower heads, automated sinks with half-gallon-per-minute aerators and half-gallon flow urinals throughout the building. Those features curtail roughly 11,000 gallons of water per event and more than 1.95 million gallons of water per year.

A water condensate water recovery system, still in the design stages, would help capture condensate from large units and even retain water that comes off the sheet of ice used for the NHL's Thrashers games.

"Condensation is the most pure form of water because it doesn't have any contaminants in it," said Barry Henson, Vice President of Building and Event Operations for Phillips Arena, which spent roughly \$200,000 on the LEED project, including \$105,000 for technical assistance and expertise. "We can recapture that and use it for irrigation."

Not all the arena's LEED features are at ground level. An added layer of insulation underneath the roof resulted in Phillips increasing its R value by 6. For those not schooled in the world of R values, it represents the rate at which you can retain your environment inside by the thickness of insulation. And an anti-microbial reflective membrane was added to the roof, which Henson singled out as vital. Membranes without the anti-microbial feature build up mold, which is black and ends up retaining the heat that the reflective membrane was supposed to divert.

Green roofing materials also play a role at AmericanAirlines Arena, which has a roof with a solar reflective index high enough that it reduces the energy needed to cool the building. The arena also boasts an underground parking structure which eliminates the "heat-island effect" caused by open-air, asphalt parking lots; walk-off carpets with bristles that trap the dust and debris caught from outside; and a micro-irrigation system that feeds water straight to the roots of the site's native plants, thus reducing the amount of water evaporated by the sun in a conventional sprinkler irrigation system.

Perhaps more impressive than any feature was that the arena was able to secure LEED certification by going through the extensive design and application process in-house. Approximately 550 hours were spent by a three-man Operations staff, who did much of the leg work. (The team estimated the "soft costs" of their work time at \$48,000, which comprised most of the \$74,000 to secure LEED status. Another \$15,000 in "hard costs" went to official certification and \$10,000 was paid to expedite the application process.)

Kim Stone, Executive Vice President and General Manager of AmericanAirlines Arena, explained that it is realistic for an in-house team to take care of the LEED application process.

"It's a step-by-step process," Stone said. "As long as you have the engineering knowledge, the knowledge of your building and great record keeping, you have an advantage."

Despite its advantages in encouraging social responsibility among organizations, reaching LEED status isn't the end-all, be-all in order to be 'green,' said Sarah Gudeman, a mechanical design engineer and LEED Accredited Professional in Omaha, Nebr.

"I don't think a building has to be LEED-certified to be sustainable," Gudeman said, although she adds that the process "helps companies think about strategies they normally wouldn't consider."

And what might not have been considered possible even several years ago was made a reality in the last year by three NBA teams playing in LEED arenas. Even those teams aren't willing to settle for the sustainable features their buildings offer.

Oxley noted that the Rose Garden could see solar-thermal energy and a rainwater reclamation system in its future. With more than 36 inches of rain per year falling in Portland, according to Travel Portland, it would be sensible to save the water and re-use it for irrigation and other purposes, similar to what's being done at Phillips Arena.

According to Oxley, it's all about being responsible. "Running a building in as an efficient manner as possible is the most fiscally important thing you can do."

Henson made similar remarks, citing social responsibility as a primary factor to the importance of becoming a LEED building.

"We felt that by making all the changes we could and going for LEED certification it would make a bigger

won't be ignored.

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impact on the way we operate and the way we're viewed in the community," Henson said.

More teams apparently feel that way, as indicated by the possibility of more LEED arenas in the NBA's future. The Orlando Magic, who are set to open Amway Center in October, plan on becoming LEED-certified by incorporating features which include remediating a brownfield site that lies adjacent to many high density residential, retail and community developments; installing landscaped plazas at arena entrances; treating storm water runoff; and implementing low-flow plumbing features.

Many other NBA teams could take the same path as the Hawks, Heat, Trail Blazers and Magic.

The Houston Rockets, who play at Toyota Center, submitted an application for LEED certification to the USGBC and are awaiting a response. The Phoenix Suns recently completed a LEED feasibility study for US Airways Center and are looking at the next steps for the arena to become a LEED building; the San Antonio Spurs are working on a LEED feasibility study to determine if they should go forward with certification for AT&T Center. The Cleveland Cavaliers have had internal discussions about certification for Quicken Loans Arena and TD Banknorth, home of the Boston Celtics, has had similar internal discussions. The Philadelphia 76ers' arena, Wachovia Center, is registered with the USGBC and is looking to obtain LEED certification in the future.

Six other teams that responded to a question of future LEED certification — the Charlotte Bobcats, Detroit Pistons, Memphis Grizzlies, Toronto Raptors, Utah Jazz and Washington Wizards — don't have plans to do so at this time but they run independent sustainability programs for their arenas, which is the case for every NBA team.

For instance, the L.A. Clippers and Lakers play at Staples Center, which houses more than 1,700 solar panels on its roof and boasts water-free urinals, certified 'green' cleaning chemicals and a comprehensive waste and recycling program. The Minnesota Timberwolves' home arena, Target Center, has a 2.5 acre green roof which captures nearly 1 million gallons of storm water per year.

As energy conservation and sustainability efforts garner more awareness and acceptance in different industries, sports fans can expect to see more sports organizations travel down the road of LEED certification. And by next year, the NBA could celebrate its Green Week by highlighting several more teams who have achieved LEED status for their arena.

Note: The Portland Trail Blazers worked with Pacific Power and Northwest Natural in conjunction with their LEED certification. The Atlanta Hawks worked with Southeast Energy Institute and Southeast Link and the Miami Heat worked with Waste Management.

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T Bone Posted: Apr.13 at 4:37 pm

i guess this post wont get many comments, but as a structural/civil engineer working on developing 'green' buildings, i think its a great article.

David Posted: Apr.13 at 4:49 pm

this is great news. thanks for the write up.

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