

Still silver



GRB keeps LEED

With apologies to Kermit the Frog, it's not easy being green.

With 1.8 million square feet under roof and an operating schedule that varies with daily events, staff at Houston's George R. Brown Convention Center knows all too well the challenge of being energy efficient.

Nevertheless, the GRB cleared every hurdle in the painstaking task of being recertified as a LEED Silver building.

The convention center earned its original LEED certification in 2011, under the requirements set for existing buildings. To retain that status, the GRB had to meet recertification criteria for energy savings, CO₂ emissions, waste recycling and indoor environmental quality.

Of note, the GRB was able to reduce water usage by 25 percent during the measuring period in part by installing four new chillers and more efficient hardware fixtures throughout the convention center.

In addition, the GRB was able to recycle 900 tons of construction materials, diverting it from area landfills. This reuse of steel, concrete, and granite tiles resulted in a savings of \$2 million

Wanda Adams, sustainability manager of the GRB, said neither certification nor subsequent recertification is a lead-pipe cinch.

"There's nothing automatic about recertification," Adams said. "We improved from where we were in 2011 and when this current certification period ends in 2021, we will have had to have performed even better. It's not a suggestion; it's a requirement of recertification."

David Osterhout, the GRB's director of operations, credits day-to-day attention to detail, as well as budget planning, for reducing the center's "carbon footprint."

"You can't possibly meet LEED requirements by just adding up the numbers at the end of the year and crossing your fingers," Osterhout said. "Reducing, reusing and recycling have to be on your radar screen at all times."

Osterhout credits some of the energy reduction to the acquisition of a new building automation system. BAS is the automatic centralized control of heating, ventilation and air conditioning, lighting and other systems.

"We have activity at all hours of the day at the George R. Brown," Osterhout said. "But our BAS sensors detect differing work loads and respond accordingly. It removes the imperfect human element and makes us more energy efficient."

Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, or LEED, is an internationally recognized green building certification system, providing independent verification that a building is designed to improve performance.