U.S. Green Building Council Launches Blueprint for Building Decarbonization and Corporate Practice Toolkit

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The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) today released two comprehensive resources during New York Climate Week designed to accelerate decarbonization of the world's existing building stock. "The Decarbonization Blueprint: Reducing Emissions and Creating Value in Existing Buildings" report and USGBC's Corporate Practice Toolkit for High-Performance Buildings provide organizations with the frameworks, data, and practical tools needed to transform real estate portfolios into high-performance, low-carbon assets. The two resources come as the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Limiting Overshoot report calls for urgent action to mitigate the effects of exceeding 1.5°C, a likely near-term outcome.

"*The existing building stock represents one of the most immediate levers we have for carbon reduction – and the challenge isn't awareness, its activation*," said **Sarah Zaleski, Chief products officer, USGBC and Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI)**. "*Building tenants, owners and operators are asking for higher performing buildings; what they need is a credible, structured pathway that connects ambition to action. USGBC is meeting that need by providing the frameworks, tools and expertise needed to decarbonize existing buildings and helping companies develop internal policies and align procurement with their goals*."

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is the world's most widely used green building rating system, and "**The Decarbonization Blueprin**t" report draws on data from nearly 11,000 LEED for Building Operations and Maintenance (LEED O+M) certified projects across 90 countries, representing 5 billion square feet. The projects have achieved an estimated 10.3 million metric tons of annual greenhouse gas emission savings and 81.8 million metric tons of cumulative reductions across a comprehensive view of emissions sources. For example, the report highlights how projects are using low global warming potential (GWP) refrigerants to reduce impacts. They are also working to minimize refrigerant leakage, a critical, yet less frequently discussed component of decarbonization.

The report further documents how performance-based frameworks deliver measurable emissions reductions, operational value, and long-term decarbonization outcomes at scale. Featuring data and illustrative examples, the report demonstrates that emissions reduction can be achieved and verified in diverse markets and building types.

One example of how verified performance is reshaping existing buildings is the Empire State Building in New York City, the first LEED v5 Platinum project in New York. Beginning in 2009, Empire State Realty Trust (ESRT) implemented one of the most successful deep energy retrofits of an existing building in the world. ESRT designed the energy retrofit, part of a broader renovation, to demonstrate the business case for large-scale decarbonization of existing commercial assets and published all tools and methods as open-source resources for replication.

The results are impressive:

- 59% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions since 2007
- As of December 2024, the building achieved a 9.6% reduction in energy consumption relative to its 2023 baseline.
- The Empire State Building aims to be a net zero building by 2030, with an 80% reduction in operational carbon emissions by 2030.

Empowering Corporate Action with Ready-to-Use Tools
USGBC's new Corporate Practice Toolkit for High-Performance Buildings provides practical guidance and model language to help organizations implement policies, procurement decisions, and building-scale actions aligned with their real estate portfolio goals.

The toolkit consists of the Corporate Policy Guide for High-Performance Buildings and the Corporate Procurement Guide for High-Performance Buildings.

A corporate green building policy establishes internal guidelines that support optimal decision-making across all aspects of real estate—from capital planning and site selection to design, construction, operation, and maintenance of owned or leased assets. Compiling these expectations into a coherent written policy embedded in corporate governance structures is an essential step toward consistent practices that turn one-off green building investments into portfolio-wide strategies.

Corporate sustainability leads, building professionals, and other stakeholders can use the free, interactive toolkit to quickly set policies, identify strategies, and utilize sample language to scale portfolio-wide action toward corporate goals such as decarbonization and resilience. The toolkit covers topics such as green building certification, risk and resilience, decarbonization, energy and water, and indoor air quality, among others. The guides feature peer examples to help provide context and make the case to corporate leaders.

"*Organizations are facing mounting pressure from investors, tenants, and regulators to demonstrate measurable progress on sustainability, yet many lack the in-house expertise to translate goals into practical company-wide actions*," said **Elizabeth Beardsley, senior policy counsel, USGBC**. "*By making it easier for organizations to establish and execute green building policies, we're accelerating a market-wide transformation toward high-performance buildings*."

Financial Returns Align with Climate Goals
USGBC's new tools are designed to help more companies access green building strategies by explaining pathways, illustrating outcomes and co-benefits, and providing examples. Consistently, green building retrofit projects deliver both operational savings and asset value to owners.

These tools will help companies position themselves by implementing their decarbonization and resilience goals and achieve positive financial outcomes.

The Decarbonization Blueprint report also cites studies showing that energy-efficient commercial buildings can command higher sale prices, rental premiums, and occupancy rates, translating into higher asset valuations and revenue, as well as other benefits such as reduced exposure to building performance penalties and potential for reduced insurance premiums.

These financial performance indicators demonstrate that decarbonization is not merely an environmental imperative but a sound business strategy.

Pathways for Every Stage of Climate Action
USGBC's pathways for decarbonizing existing assets are structured to meet organizations at different stages of their journey to high performance—from those beginning to track operational performance to those planning deep reductions across global portfolios.

Frameworks such as LEED O+M and PERFORM, alongside strategic decarbonization plans, standardize measurement, drive operational improvements, and maintain documentation trails that support credible ESG disclosures and assurance-ready data.

Both "The Decarbonization Blueprint" report and the Corporate Practice Toolkit are available on the USGBC website.

About the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)
The U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) accelerates and scales the transformation of the built environment to minimize climate impacts and enhance the well-being of people, the environment, and communities worldwide. USGBC leads market transformation through LEED and other green building certification and enablement programs, robust educational offerings, an international network of industry leaders, the annual Greenbuild International Conference & Expo, the Center for Green Schools, and advocacy in support of public policy that encourages and enables green buildings and communities. For more information, visit usgbc.org and connect on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

About Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI)

GBCI is the world's leading sustainability and health certification and credentialing body, independently recognizing excellence in performance and practice globally while promoting adoption of building and business practices that continually and measurably improve health, equity, resilience and environmental wellbeing for all. GBCI administers project certifications and professional credentials and certificates including, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating systems, as well as the PEER standard for power systems, the Sustainable SITES Initiative (SITES), EDGE (Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies), TRUE certification for zero waste and Investor Confidence Project (ICP) for energy efficiency retrofits.