

FEMA Administrator Fugate Applauds Green Building as a Cornerstone of the Resiliency Agenda

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FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate speaks at the National Press Club in DC

Yesterday, Administrator of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\)](#) [Craig Fugate](#) delivered a rousing speech on the role green building can play to ensure resilient communities for a changing planet. Fugate served as the keynote speaker of the second installment of the [National Leadership Speaker Series on Resiliency and Security in the 21st Century](#) at the National Press Club in Washington, DC.



The Administrator focused thematically on risk and better accountability in a changing world:

“We cannot afford to continue to respond to disasters and deal with the consequences under the current model. Risk that is not mitigated, that is not considered in return on investment calculations, will often set up false economies. We will reach a point where we can no longer subsidize this.”

He also described the disconnect between total cost of ownership and action. He used the analogy of purchasing a car - does the consumer really understand the upfront cost versus the costs of insurance, gas, upkeep, etc.? It's getting better because few would purchase a car with low fuel economy with gas prices at their current level, but there's still a long way to go. It's an apt analogy that also applies to buildings. Fugate said buildings also have long-term operating costs and risk factors that must be taken into consideration during construction and renovation.

Buildings that are resource and energy efficient from the beginning help ensure the long-term viability over their life-cycle. With the greater frequency of what meteorologists deem one-hundred or five-hundred-year weather events, we need to have better planning and more robust preventative strategies into the process of designing, constructing and operating buildings. The Administrator then linked LEED's green building strategies to disaster prevention strategies. He stated, “Being green is one part of being resilient,” and added that resilient and green communities begin at the local level with better building codes, standards and zoning plans.

Jason Hartke, Vice President of National Policy at the U.S. Green Building Council and co-founder of the Resiliency Series with ICLEI USA, set the context for the Administrator's remarks, stating:

“The resiliency agenda is an action agenda – a forward-thinking agenda. It's an agenda that adds calcium to the bones, fuels our ability to lead, and powers our productivity. With resiliency, we accept our vulnerability, but we refuse to be paralyzed by its veil of uncertainty...At its core, resiliency is about replacing pessimism with optimism; exchanging surprise for readiness; expediency for planning.”

These sentiments were mirrored in the subsequent remarks of the event's expert speakers.

The Feb. 29 luncheon also featured the launch of a landmark joint report by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. The seminal piece of research examines how green buildings advance resiliency by helping us incorporate building strategies that better mitigate, plan and prepare for future climatic conditions. The report, [Green Building and Climate Resilience: Understanding Impacts and Preparing for Changing Conditions](#), describes potential adaptive strategies available to green building practitioners. These strategies add an important new dimension to green building's long-standing focus on reducing greenhouse gases through energy efficiency and renewable and low-carbon energy supplies.

During the presentation of the report and its findings, USGBC's Vice President for Research Dr. Chris Pyke, explained the research this way:

“Every building is designed for a specific range of conditions, such as peak temperature, storm surge and average precipitation. Climate change has the potential to undermine some of these assumptions and potentially increase risks to people and property. Fortunately, there are practical steps we can take to understand and prepare for the consequences of changing environmental conditions and reduce potential impacts. This can help green buildings meet and exceed expectations for comfort and performance long into the future.”

The report, which identifies the deep synergies between green building and resiliency, advances several firsts in the field, such as: examining the implications of climate change for green building and identifies opportunities for resilience through the design, construction, and operation of buildings and communities; analyzing how individual LEED credits support regional adaptation needs, such as enhanced water conservation in arid climates and water-sensitive regions; and demonstrating how consideration of climate resilience in buildings can increase the likelihood of achieving performance goals throughout the lifetime of a project.

[Learn more about the report and its findings »](#)

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