



Resiliency & Sustainability: A Great Convergence and Synergies in Solutions

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It's not zero sum. It's not either/or. It's not this or that.

Instead, when it comes to sustainability and resiliency, we need (and thankfully we're seeing) a great convergence.



Not only do the agendas of these two great causes overlap, but their destinies must be forged together.

This is certainly true for the built environment. Just last week, Administrator Craig Fugate of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) made the point at our [National Press Club event](#): "Being green is one part of being resilient."

At the same event, USGBC, in partnership with the University of Michigan, released a first-of-its-kind report – [Green Building and Climate Resilience](#) – showing the myriad ways that green building strategies in LEED support a more resilient built environment.

For example, the size of our heating and cooling systems, which are calibrated for past climate conditions, could create new vulnerabilities in the face of future changes in climate. Our pavements, if not designed with tomorrow in mind, could create new risks in the face of heavier, more intense precipitation events. Our storm water management systems could be overwhelmed by more frequent and more powerful storms. However, our building systems, as the report explains, could help make us more resilient if we begin to account for changing temperatures, stronger storms, more intense precipitation events, more flooding, and more frequent and lengthier droughts.

Like a beacon, the report signals a simple, but fundamental point --- that we need to think differently, and with more foresight, about preparing our buildings for tomorrow. The buildings of today need to be built, retrofitted and operated for the environment and the risks of tomorrow. It's a matter of responsibility and accountability.

"How many times did you hear last year, 'This is a hundred-year event'? We had one the year before that was categorized as a 500-year event. People are going, 'Well, then we don't have to worry for another 500 years,'" said Fugate on the importance of better accounting for risk.

We can no longer rationalize risk away by thinking this disaster or that catastrophe won't happen to us. And we know the risk of tomorrow is changing before our eyes. And these vulnerabilities touch many more of us than we think. According to Environment America, [four out of five Americans](#) live in places that have been federally declared as weather-related disaster areas at some point since 2006.

And don't just take it from me about the need for action. Last week major re-insurers leaders (you know, those folks who insure insurance companies) came to Capitol Hill to extend the [same message](#).

"A warming climate will only add to this trend of increasing losses, which is why action is needed now," said Mark Way, who runs Swiss Re's sustainability and climate change activities in North America. (Ceres President Mindy Lubber's recent blog provides a great recount of their visit: [Insurers Brace for Stormy Weather as the World Warms](#))

The changing nature of risk is something Fugate understands all too well. "Risk that is not mitigated, that is not factored into community resiliency ... often sets up false economies that say, 'As long as somebody comes in and makes us whole, we can keep doing what we're doing.' What if we reach the point where we're not able to subsidize that?"

If readiness is the answer, it'll mean we need to do a much better job of integrating risk and accounting for risk across our solution strategies. Doing so will save us money and make us stronger. But we need to do it mindfully.

"Through a mitigation practice, if you're looking at one hazard - looking at roof attachments, how we built our roofs, how we built the envelope - the unintended consequence was in many cases we were actually improving energy efficiency," said Fugate.

So, the big question is, as Fugate later noted, "How do we get the synergy of looking at multiple things?"

The good news is that green building, with its synergies-in-solutions approach, helps to show the way. In fact, LEED, with its emphasis on integrated design, was

founded on synergies in solutions. And our resiliency report, as discussed above, details how we can advance these synergies across the building sector. Let the great convergence begin.



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