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Session Spotlight: The Role of Green Buildings in Economic Recovery

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Credit: U.S. Army Environmental Command

661,000: That's how many architects, engineers and contractors reported having green jobs last fall in a McGraw-Hill Construction study.

Beyond the positive environmental and health benefits of green buildings, we also know they're an economic driver in a down economy. In an economy where construction activity is at an all time low, green building construction has remained strong and even grown in several sectors.

We're bringing this discussion to Greenbuild with the session "The Role of Green Buildings in Economic Recovery," featuring industry pros Harvey M. Bernstein, Vice President, Industry Insights & Alliances, McGraw-Hill Construction; Rob Watson, Chairman, CEO, and Chief Scientist, EcoTech International; and Gregory Kats, President, Capital- E.
Below, Watson & Bernstein give you an inside look at their forthcoming Greenbuild session.

What's the topical focus of your session?

RW: We will be discussing how green business is good business and sharing success stories and practical strategies of those who are proving that the bottom line of green is black.

HB: The focus of the presentation is on the impact of the green jobs in construction on the economy. Green building has been one of the few growth sectors during the deep recession in construction, and it is poised to thrive with the recovery as well. Green projects, though, require different skills, and the deeper green a project is, the more it changes the approach to design and construction from the status quo. This session will explore what kind of green jobs are being created and the impact they have on an industry that has suffered the recession and its impacts more intensely than almost any other sector, especially when it comes to job loss.

What makes you an expert in this area?

RW: I have been working internationally in market transformation for over 25 years and have seen the success of programs that I have been instrumental in developing, such as the LEED Green Building Rating System.

HB: In my role as the Vice President of Industry Insights and Alliances, I lead McGraw-Hill Construction's cutting edge research into green and other construction issues and work closely with the economists who provide the most important construction data and forecasts in the industry. I also can draw on over 30 years of experience in the construction industry, including as President and CEO of the Civil Engineering Research Foundation, where I advised the industry on the impact of emerging trends.

Why is the topic of your session important?

RW: Aligning human economic systems with environmental imperatives will be the defining issue of the 21st Century.

HB: Since the beginning of the recession, the construction industry has been the focus of much green job discussion. As this discourse has become increasingly politicized, understanding the true nature of green jobs in this critical industry as well as their impact on the economy is critical to understand the full value the

rise of green building brings to our fiscal as well as environmental wellbeing. Jobs in the construction sector are fundamentally different from those in other "green job" sectors, which can be measured in terms of the output of green products and services. The complexity of the construction process includes the interaction of many players over a protracted period, and a simple measure of green buildings does not provide much clarity into the how green jobs are changing the industry. This session will seek to do so, as well as to look at how the lingering impacts of the recession and the incipient recovery will impact green jobs and green building in the future.

Why should Greenbuild attendees attend YOUR session specifically?

RW: For the past four years I have written the Green Building Market and Impact Report, which is the only study published to date on the environmental impacts--past and future--of LEED. This research also included in-depth information on the economic impacts of green buildings.

HB: Green jobs are becoming an increasing part of the construction industry. Understanding what they are, how they are changing, how they impact the overall economy and how they are being impacted by both industry and economic trends will help green professionals make better choices in their own careers and in the hiring strategies for their firm. The session will also provide them with insights about the trends for growth in the green construction sector and the role of public and private financing in growing the green market.

What's the most interesting non-green building related fact about yourself?

RW: I lived in an urban zen monastery for a year.

HB: I serve as a Visiting Professor with the University of Reading's School of Construction Management and Engineering in London, England, and in that role, I have the opportunity to lecture undergraduate and graduate students from across the globe who attend that program. They are both progressive and challenging, and I often gain as much from our exchanges as they do, especially given the broad range of backgrounds and experiences they bring into the classroom. It is nice to be able to step outside the business world and learn about what is important to our younger generation and how I can help prepare them for the future.

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