

A Codes Retrospective: With IgCC's Arrival, Jurisdictions Can Now Raise the Floor with this Important New Regulatory Tool

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Today is an important day for USGBC and for green building. It marks the culmination of more than six years of work to turn a crazy idea into a tangible, attainable reality.

Today, the nation's leading code developer, which emerged from the legacy regional code bodies, has [published a model green building code](#). The International Green Construction Code (IgCC) was developed by almost everybody and, importantly, approved by the Code Council's membership of code officials. It includes the second fully-published version of a green building standard that USGBC dreamed up with ASHRAE at [Greenbuild](#) in November of 2005.

Today we also celebrate the [12,000th LEED certified commercial building](#), totaling more than 8.4 billion square feet of LEED certified space, and the beginning of a final stage of development of LEED's next version. After nearly 20,000 comments during three rounds of public review, today begins the effort to respond and fine-tune [LEED 2012](#) prior to member ballot this summer.

I'd like to travel back to that early moment in 2005 when the crazy idea of a green building code was first conceived. At that time, dozens (soon-to-be hundreds) of local governments were searching for a prescriptive, code-intended tool that could extend protections from the human and environmental health risks illuminated by greener building practice. LEED was taking off at an amazing trajectory, and new rating systems were under development for both homes and core & shell buildings to add to the LEED suite of new construction, existing buildings and commercial interiors rating systems.

The initial conversation took place alongside [Greenbuild 2005](#) in Atlanta, GA. Atlanta at that time shared a lot in common with many American cities. After several decades of urban flight, its urban core was growing again. In it, there was an early excitement for LEED buildings in its downtown, and a growing understanding of green building practice thanks to a [regional green building organization](#) headquartered in town. Its city-wide sustainability efforts were fledgling (at least compared to today), and leaning largely on the state's building energy code that – like anywhere else – was doing what it could.

As a city, its sustainability future looked reasonably promising, but amazingly daunting.

It was a November morning, not far from Centennial Olympic Park. The air was crisp, but not bitter, and missing the more familiar smells of magnolia, pine and peach trees with a heavy dose of humidity. The city was swarming with green building professionals in town for another record-breaking Greenbuild event. It was the perfect setting for inspiration.

I wasn't there, but here's how I think the conversation probably went over breakfast that morning between Brendan Owens, head of LEED technical development and ASHRAE leadership:

Owens: "Hey, ASHRAE."

ASHRAE: "Hey, USGBC."

Owens: "Can you imagine a world where today's green building practice is so commonplace, so accepted, and so well understood that it's just the way buildings are built?"

ASHRAE: "You mean like part of the building code?"

Owens: "Sure. But building codes don't address any of this right now. How do we speed this up?"

ASHRAE: "Well, we're already leveraging codes to drive energy efficiency into the mainstream in an unparalleled way with Standard 90.1."

Owens: "Could we speed up the adoption of greener building practice if we wrote a new standard that draws from the best practices that already define certain elements of high-performance buildings?"

ASHRAE: "And then define and standardize areas of energy, site, water, materials, indoor environmental quality and building operations that haven't yet been standardized?"

Owens: "And this could drive future code and standard development, which would be referenced in construction contracts, enforced as code and applied universally for all buildings, making it easier for these projects to strive for leadership and even pursue LEED certification?"

ASHRAE: "Yes, I think we can do that. Our partners at IES, with whom we write Standard 90.1, are sure to be excited."

Owens: "We could change the world, or at least change it so much more quickly..."

About three years later, the International Code Council had a similar conversation with AIA and ASTM. I won't re-enact it for you, but they were dreaming up a similarly intended code document for use primarily by IGC's member code officials.

a similarly-intended code document for use primarily by ICC's member code officials.

By March of 2010, the conversations had merged toward a common vision through partnership – one unlike the building industry had ever seen. The first, ANSI-approved version of ASHRAE Standard 189.1 was published, the first draft of the IgCC was released and the world breathed a surprising sigh of relief as these six organizations [stood side-by-side](#) to usher in a more sustainable future... together.

It's now two years later. LEED 2012 is in its final stages of development. The 2012 [IgCC is now released](#). A previously unimaginable partnership of six leading building industry organizations stand beside it. USGBC has established advocacy campaigns to engage in the improvement of better building codes (see: [Build Better Codes](#)) and to promote and reward [leadership with LEED](#).

Mainstreaming green has never felt more achievable. Are you helping your state or community take its next steps towards a more sustainable future?

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