

'Watershed Event' Explores What's Next for Green in the Codes

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Written by [Jeremy Sigmon](#)

Posted in [Advocacy and policy](#)

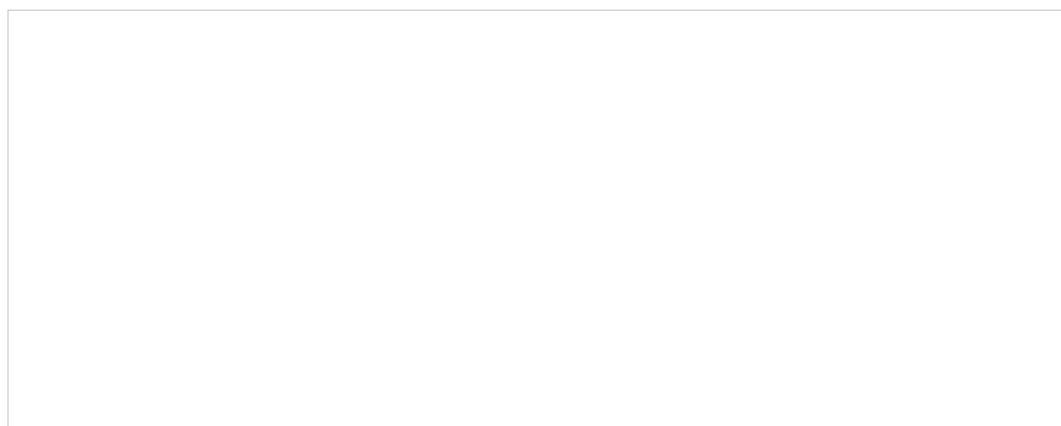
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An impressive collection of the building code glitterati gathered a couple of weeks ago for our inaugural Codes Summit at the [Greenbuild International Conference and Expo](#). All together, more than 350 wonks, experts, specialists, professionals, advocates and other stakeholders participated in the summit held in San Francisco. Through a total of 19 hours of programming and discussion, we explored the next horizons in our community's efforts to advance green building through the codes. It was a "watershed event for codes within the green building community," said Sheila Blake, assistant director of code enforcement for the City of Houston, TX.

The increasing uptake of green building practice above and beyond the code has resulted in an important shift toward mainstreaming green that is increasingly reflected in both the Greenbuild conference and the council's [advocacy campaigns](#). As a result, USGBC and 24 sponsors teamed up to host this full day of programming and discussion to explore the growing public interest in developing and adopting green expectations and requirements for our buildings. (See sponsors on page 2 of this [summit flyer](#).) We spent a lot of time looking ahead and thinking big with a diverse audience from many professions, from across the country and from at least a half-dozen other countries. This set the summit apart from many of the other code-focused events of the season at the local, state, regional and national levels.

The speaker lineup, varied content and diverse audience provided a unique opportunity to explore, through the lens of codes, such green building topics as commissioning, building water use, net-zero energy, Title 24 implementation, the International Green Construction Code (IgCC), human health, international best practices and more. Morning and midday [headline speakers](#) (see top of page 2) asked provocative questions while also providing what headliner Chris Mathis, President of Mathis Consulting Company called, "100 years of inspiration in 10 minutes."

USGBC Senior Vice President Roger Platt set the stage for the day's discussions, drawing a direct connection between regulatory efforts to raise the floor and the Council's work to advance green building leadership. "Your efforts to leverage codes to spread the impact of greener building practice fundamentally advances our mission of a market transformed." This statement was even more powerful given its context at the start of the world's largest conference and expo dedicated to green building. At the conference, the inimitable Dr. Art Rosenfeld (who is "obsessively promoting the idea that building codes... should give urgent priority to [white roofs](#)") was the recipient of the [USGBC President's award](#).

Ken Alex, senior advisor to California Governor Jerry Brown and director of the Office of Planning and Research, gave the morning welcome address. Alex highlighted the bold steps that the Brown Administration is taking to facilitate economic growth that also balances environmental and climate risks. In a quick poll of the audience, Director Alex expressed his surprise and enthusiasm about how, despite California being the first and only state with a mandatory, statewide green building code, approximately two-thirds of the audience was from out of state.

"It's like all these people forgot that building codes and standards are supposed to be boring!" joked David Cohan of the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance.

It strikes me as obvious that the [IgCC](#) and the [partnership](#) that supports it are a major catalyst for this increasingly national interest in the green code discussion. The majority of our audience and speakers may very likely have preferred to be elsewhere were it not for the momentum generated over the past 32 months (yes, I'm counting) by this multilateral national effort that is driving community engagement on green building and codes.

In particular, USGBC Vice President Brendan Owens thanked [David Eisenberg](#), who, as a former USGBC board member and Codes Committee chair, inspired and led USGBC's initial work in the codes arena. Eisenberg continues to serve as a leading influential voice on leveraging the role of the code official to achieve responsible building outcomes at scale. As he mentioned in a comment during a follow-up Greenbuild panel on building codes that I organized two days later, "The only thing we can clearly say about our building regulatory system is that it's not a system. It wasn't designed as a system, has no system goals or principles and no functional mechanisms to acknowledge and balance risks across regulatory silos or scales." Clearly, we have much more work to do to harness its full potential.

So our work is cut out for us between now and [next year in Philadelphia](#). If you missed the summit, or if you (like I) wished you could have been in multiple places at once, here are a couple ways to get you up to speed:

- [Purchase the full Codes Summit proceedings](#) so you, too can enjoy the 17 sessions, 60 speakers and 19 hours of content for only \$100 (other Greenbuild proceedings also available).
- Thanks to the in-kind donations from a few of our sponsors for their note-taking support, soon you'll have access to a quick, written summary from each of the summit sessions. [E-mail me](#) if you would like to receive notification of when these become available.

Please also add your thoughts, questions and observations in the comments section below. What did you think about the 2012 Greenbuild Codes Summit?

See also:

- [A Long-Overdue Conversation on Green Building and the Codes](#)
- [Build Better Codes: USGBC Deepens Market Transformation Efforts through Advocacy Campaigns](#) (ED+C - July 2012)
- [Panel Envisions a World in Which Green Is a Given](#) (EcoHome Magazine - April 2012)

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