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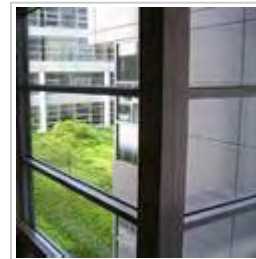


Helping make commercial buildings greener by design

Wednesday, 24 September 2008

A world-first environmental impact calculator, which measures environmental values and risks in commercial buildings, was introduced this week at the Sustainable Buildings 08 conference in Melbourne. The developers claim the tool can help create greener structures in a time when investors are increasingly looking for sustainable buildings and as studies show humanity's ecological impact needs curbing.

The life cycle assessment design programme lets users measure and compare changes to new and refurbished designs and see "in seconds" the impact of design improvements on ecosystems, health, resources, costs and carbon impacts.



"It is the first calculator that works directly from the building designer's model, allowing architects and engineers to optimise the best environmental outcome in real time or 'on the fly'," said Environment Minister Peter Garrett at the product's launch.

The [LCADesign](#) lets users – such as developers, architects, engineers, builders, manufacturers and local governments – model changes to a building's operating energy and water requirements, generating comparative results to see the overall ecological impact, claims the Cooperative Research Centre for Construction Innovation (CRCCI).

"As global pressure mounts for greener buildings, this eco-efficiency assessment tool provides industry with vital information so design can be more ecologically and economically sustainable," said CRCCI chief executive Dr Keith Hampson.

The man who introduced the idea of ecological footprints to the world, Professor Bill Rees from the University of British Columbia, pointed out that although residential buildings are twice as resource efficient now than 50 years ago, the actual floor space per person has gone up 300%.

"If everyone were like the average Australian or Canadian, we'd need four additional planet Earths" because of excessive consumption of resources, he said.

"So we're growing more sustainably, but that does not solve the problem ... if your ship is already full and you keep loading it up with efficiently produced goods, it's going to sink."

Professor Rees said developed nations must help emerging economies with booming, energy-intensive construction work, like China and India, to be "as green as possible". Locally, the focus should be on retrofitting existing building stock more than on new construction, he added.

A Total Environment Centre study found commercial properties with upgraded energy efficiency features, "will safeguard existing margins against rising costs and will ensure that individual buildings remain attractive to tenants".

The *Commercial Properties & Climate Change – Exposures and Opportunities report* author Cameron Eren said emissions reduction projects offer building owners "above-market" rates of returns. They are both profitable and eligible for subsidies.

"Reducing emissions from existing buildings is a risk management exercise that is ultimately profitable for the sector," he said.

The Industry Superannuation Property Trust chief executive Daryl Browning also said it made business sense for investors to be more interested in green buildings that take account of sustainability.

He said the construction of a non-green building would incur massive risks because it was harder to finance and to find tenants, and in these turn reduce the building's future capital value because of "accelerated obsolescence".

"We are primarily an investor of superannuation money, what we're about is delivering returns on a continual basis ... so our job is to make sure that our portfolio is very low risk, has a high occupancy level and a low probability of tenants moving out of the building," Browning said.

"(That) means we've got to make sure the stock is green."

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