

Headline	Time to make green buildings mandatory		
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# Time to make green buildings mandatory?

Some say it should start with government projects, others feel private sector should take the lead



by Laura Lee

**IS Malaysia ready for a mandatory adoption of green buildings? When this question was posed to various industry players at an open forum at the recently concluded Green**

**Buildings & Parks World (GBPW) 2017 in Kuala Lumpur, the reactions were rather mixed.**

Some felt that in the absence of political will, the private sector should take the lead as it had come up with the Green Building Index (GBI) rating tool in 2009.

The government launched its Malaysian Carbon Reduction and Environmental Sustainability Tool (MyCREST) only last May.

In the case of the latter, the government mandates that all public building projects worth RM50 mil and above adopt MyCREST to reduce carbon emissions in the construction industry.

The Works Ministry, via the Public Works Department (PWD), oversees this with the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB).

Ahmad Farrin Mokhtar, general manager of CIDB's safety, health, environment and quality division, says currently public building projects costing below RM50 mil come under the PWD but by next year, they will all be under MyCREST.

For highway projects, he cites the soon-to-be-launched Malaysia Green Highway Index (MyGHI) imposed by the

Malaysian Highway Authority as another example of mandatory commitments by the government for public projects.

At present, Ahmad Farrin believes the mandatory aspect has to be borne by the government as it is not easy to impose it on the private sector.

**"Once the ecosystem is ready and we have enough professionals, designers, green contractors and workers, then we can make it mandatory for all projects.**

**But it has to start with government**

projects. Along the way, we have to do more engagements with the stakeholders, get their views and inputs on how to make it easier for everybody."

As part of CIDB's strategies for its green initiatives, he says it will rope in a few high-profile players from the private sector to get their support and buy-in.

## Issue of skilled workers

Meanwhile, CIDB has appointed its subsidiary Construction Research Institute of Malaysia (CREAM) to undertake a study whether it has enough green workers, green materials and designers with full knowledge of green matters.

"If you were to ask me if our industry is ready or not, I am not sure if we have enough people to undertake the green policies," quips Ahmad Farrin.

Certain quarters feel the market for green buildings and green concepts is fast catching up in the country.

In Singapore, the Building and Construction Authority's Green Mark Platinum rating tool has created much competition among developers and led to an all-out marketing war of sorts.

"The Green Mark Gold certification is of no use any more. It has to be Green Mark Platinum," says ICN Design International Pte Ltd director Henry Steed.

Although the GBI is well received, IEN Consultants Sdn Bhd managing director Gregers Reimann, one of the founders of the green rating tool, says the market is small.

With over 700 GBI-registered projects

in the country, these "environmentally friendly" green buildings make up only a small percentage of the total projects although they were later endorsed by the government with tax incentives.

Reimann, who is from Denmark and has worked in Malaysia as a green building consultant for the last 12 years, suggests that they be packaged as "healthy" projects to gain more appeal.

## 'GBI should be run by government'

He feels the GBI should be run by the government and not by a "Sdn Bhd" or private company, arguing that green buildings should be made mandatory only when the country is ready for it and can enforce it effectively.

Brushing aside that to go green is expensive, Reimann says green buildings in Malaysia have proven to be inexpensive based on energy savings alone as can be seen from the LEO and GEO buildings.

With the lower energy consumption, these green office buildings can expect to receive their payback in three years. Besides, huge carbon dioxide savings can also be derived from such buildings.

He notices that many of these buildings are over-designed, adding to their initial cost besides reducing their operational efficiency.

As a result, the building owners get a double penalty of higher capital expenditure in terms of construction cost and higher operating expenditure.

Since the biggest operating cost of a building is the salary of workers, it is thus important to keep productivity levels up.

Datuk Dr Abdul Aziz SA Kadir, chairman of Confexhub Group which organised the GBPW 2017, notes that a recent Harvard University research shows that living and working in green buildings can increase the cognitive function and productivity of its occupants.

Concurring with him, Eco Business Pte Ltd research director Tim Hill says the powerful effects of lighting can help

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increase productivity by between 2% and 20%.

A 2015 study by Interface shows workers in office environments with greenery and sunlight report a 15% higher level of well-being. The workers are also 15% more creative and 6% more productive.

In fact, the top five elements most desired in office space in urban environments such as city centres and suburbs are natural light (44%), indoor plants (20%), quiet working space (19%), view of the sea (17%) and bright colours (15%).

According to the World Green Building Council, among the beneficiaries of green buildings are developers, owners and tenants.

Besides complying with the laws, developers tend to benefit from lower

design and construction costs, increased market value as well as better corporate image and prestige.

### Higher productivity, better health

The owners can expect lower operating costs and increased occupancy rates as more companies are interested to take up space in their green buildings.

The tenants can expect to secure higher productivity, health and well-being, reduced staff turnover, easier hiring and lower refurbishing costs.

In the eco-business, Hill says: "We want to figure out the interest and uptake on sustainability."

He sees more green space coverage in urban areas of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand compared to Vietnam and Indonesia. The sky gardens and

sky courts created in the buildings of these countries will help to reduce the heat-island effect.

On another note, Confexhub's Abdul Aziz sees aiming for zero levels in primary energy consumption, carbon emissions during construction, waste and water consumption, as more sustainable measures than chasing or scoring points for a particular rating.

He says the same goes for the total elimination of unsustainable building materials. "The zero target may not be easy to achieve but it is a worthwhile target to strive for."

Abdul Aziz also says the components used in green homes are engineered to last longer and require less maintenance.

**FocusM**

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The Energy Commission's headquarters in Putrajaya. Known as the Diamond Building, it incorporates sustainable design and strategies that reduce environmental impact

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Ahmad Farrin says adoption of green standards should not be mandatory for all until the ecosystem is ready



Hill says the powerful effects of lighting can help increase productivity by 2-20%



Government buildings in Putrajaya. The government mandates that all public building projects worth RM50 mil and above adopt the Malaysian Carbon Reduction and Environmental Sustainability Tool