

# Making Sense of Green Home Certifications

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*By Erik Fowler, Green trends expert*



*This is the fourth article in a series designed to help you make sense of the green landscape as a real estate professional. REALTOR® Magazine's Styled, Staged & Sold blog and I are excited to be covering green home trends in America. In the [previous article](#), I provided a quick guide to green home trends. Here, we'll highlight green home ratings and certifications.*

As we discussed in the last few articles, when discussing green homes it's important to avoid generalizations or *greenwashing*, and stick to specifics. As real estate professionals, we should always insist on third-party sources of reliable and verifiable information wherever possible.

When people make "green" claims, we need to know exactly what they mean.

**Below are the most widely recognized national green building and/or energy efficient programs nationwide.** Keep in mind there are local and regional green building programs as well.

For instance, the Austin Green Building Program was not only one of the first programs in the country to develop a regional green building standard, but it is still considered to be one of the very best programs and models.

## **Commonalities Among Green Programs**

All green building programs should ideally share some common attributes, namely:

- Third-party verification;

- Performance (points) and/or a prescriptive path designed to set green “targets” in several green categories;
- Documentation;
- A resource center for the builder and the consumer.

The point to note is that a standard is followed, documented, measured, and verified. We all know what happens when standards are “self enforced” with no accountability (think latest mortgage crisis).

Also, notice below the various categories of green, what each certification addresses, and recall that green homes do more than address just energy use. While very important, energy is not the only measure of green or sustainability in a home or building.

**Green homes also encompass indoor air quality, water efficiency, materials use/selection (recycled or reclaimed), community and environmental impacts.** Keep in mind that most green building programs address new construction or major renovations. Each organization often publishes guidelines for remodeling, but remodeling projects may or may not meet the qualifications for the green building program under consideration.

## **Green Organizations**

Each excerpt below is quoted directly from the Web site of the organization.

- **LEED** (United States Green Building Council): [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

“ . . . LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) is an internationally recognized green building certification system, providing third-party verification that a building or community was designed and built using strategies aimed at improving performance across all the metrics that matter most: energy savings, water efficiency, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, and stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts. (Levels attainable are Certified, Silver, and Gold & Platinum.)”

- **National Green Building Certification** (National Association of Home Builders): [www.nahbgreen.org](http://www.nahbgreen.org)

“ . . . [NAHB Model Green Home Building Guidelines](http://www.nahbgreen.org) were written by a group of builders, researchers, environmental experts, and designers to provide guidance for builders engaged in or interested in green building products and practices for residential design, development, and construction. The Guidelines were also written to serve as a ‘baseline’ so that NAHB members could easily develop local green building programs. Divided into two parts, the Guidelines cover seven areas, or guiding principles: Lot Design; Resource Efficiency; Energy Efficiency; Water Efficiency, Indoor Environmental

Quality; Homeowner Education; and Global Impact. The Guidelines offer three levels of green building- Bronze, Silver, and Gold.”

- **Energy Star Qualified Home** (U. S. Dept of Energy & U.S. Environmental Protection Agency): [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)

“ . . . To earn the ENERGY STAR, a home must meet strict guidelines for energy efficiency set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These homes are at least 15% more energy efficient than homes built to the 2004 International Residential Code (IRC), and include additional energy-saving features that typically make them 20–30% more efficient than standard homes.”

- **Environments for Living** (Masco Home Services, Inc.): [www.environmentsforliving.com](http://www.environmentsforliving.com)

“ . . . is able to offer the limited guarantee on energy used for heating and cooling your home because the combination of special framing techniques, improved insulation systems and efficient ductwork helps manage the energy you use to heat and cool your home. The Environments for Living Certified Green program includes building science features from the program, plus additional requirements in areas such as indoor water efficiency, lighting and appliance efficiency, and indoor environmental quality.”

- **Energy Assessment/Audit and the HERS Index** (Residential Energy Services Network): [www.natresnet.org](http://www.natresnet.org)

“ . . . RESNET Ratings provide a relative energy use index called the HERS<sup>®</sup> Index – a HERS Index of 100 represents the energy use of the “American Standard Building” and an Index of 0 (zero) indicates that the Proposed Building uses no net purchased energy (a Zero Energy Building). A set of rater recommendations for cost-effective improvements that can be achieved by the Rated Building is also produced.”