

## Chicago's supersize green buildings

November 13, 2007 5:00 PM PDT

Chicago is set to claim one of the world's largest retail spaces and America's tallest building as green. The city announced during last week's Greenbuild conference that both the Sears Tower and the Merchandise Mart are being retrofitted to meet LEED certification through Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design ratings of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Shown towering over the green roof of a LEED-certified high-rise nearby, the Sears Tower opened in 1973 as the world's tallest skyscraper. That and 4.2 million square feet of retail space in the Merchandise Mart are being retrofitted with energy efficiencies and other green features, with support from the Clinton Climate Initiative. The Merchandise Mart, built in 1930, achieved LEED Silver certification last week. Its owners are moving forward with plans to expand green features, including the addition of a green roof.

The "City of Broad Shoulders" is known for its outsized, cutting-edge architecture. The world's first skyscraper was built there 122 years ago. Local architecture heroes include Louis Sullivan and Daniel Burnham of the Chicago School of architecture. The organic designs of Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie School style are celebrated as ahead of their time.



The Merchandise Mart is one of the world's largest buildings in terms of floor space. The pedestrian walkway of the Merchandise Mart is covered with succulent plants.



Onsite recycling of fluorescent bulbs, which contain mercury, helped the Merchandise Mart to earn green credentials. A recycling center there also manages paper, glass, and batteries. Building tenants use recycled paper and energy-efficient lighting.

However, many Chicagoans complain about the lack of a reliable citywide recycling program. The vast majority of garbage in Chicago still winds up in landfills.



Bicycle storage, shown here in the Merchandise Mart, as well as space for cars that can be rented by the hour, are becoming more popular in Chicago's office and retail buildings whose owners seek a green seal of approval. Close proximity to the city's public buses, subways, and "El" lines also help to rack up points toward LEED certification.