

Merchandise Mart in Chicago Now World's Largest LEED-Certified

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CHICAGO – The City of Chicago has achieved yet another green milestone as Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc. (MMPI) has recently announced that the [Merchandise Mart](#) building in Chicago has been awarded the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) leadership in energy and environmental design (LEED-EB) silver certification.

At 4.2 million square feet, Merchandise Mart in Chicago is the world's largest commercial building. In addition, it is now the world's largest LEED-certified building as well.



Merchandise Mart has a long history of sustainability that dates back even earlier than the 1970s.

Photo courtesy of Merchandise Mart

"Merchandise Mart is to be congratulated for achieving LEED-EB silver certification," said USGBC CEO Rick Fedrizzi in a statement. "This certification sends a message that Merchandise Mart cares about the health of the building's users and employees."

In order to receive LEED certification, a building must meet the highest performance standards.

It is subjected to an independent, third-party verification in the five areas of sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality. The awards range from certified, silver, gold or platinum depending on how well the building scores.

"Our investors want long-term results," MMPI President Christopher Kennedy said in a statement. "Our city demands corporate responsibility and the community wants environmental stewardship. The LEED program helped us find common ground and proved that growth and sustainability are great partners."

Merchandise Mart began its effort to reach LEED certification in 2005 after a thorough assessment of the building's practices. The initial aim was to determine if it was possible for the building to achieve LEED certification at all since it is such a vast and one-of-a-kind structure.

The mart submitted an application in 2006 and began implementing policies and practices to begin reaching its goals in 2007.

An important part of this step was educating employees and tenants about green building programs and practices.

Merchandise Mart had actually commenced its green efforts in 1990 when it began using Green Seal-approved cleaning products. In the following year, it also created a recycling program that now includes all forms of paper, glass, light bulbs, batteries, aluminum and construction materials.

In 2006, Merchandise Mart joined Clean Air Counts: a plan with the goal to reduce smog-forming pollutants and energy consumption in the greater Chicago area.

Strategies the mart implemented include low *volatile organic compound* (VOC) cleaning products, paints and building materials along with energy-efficient lighting and alternative transportation. iGo hybrid cars are now available 24 hours a day to employees.

"We don't view this as a completed project," Merchandise Mart senior vice president Myron Maurer said in a statement. "We have developed the tools. Now we use those tools in our day-to-day operations. The mart is going to continue to refine and improve our green building practices. This is a way of life at Merchandise Mart."

With an average of 700,000 square feet being affected by construction at the mart every year, it is vital that everyone in the building always be strictly observing the LEED guidelines. In order to maintain the policies in effect, the mart has formed sustainable construction standards and has developed new policy outlines for cleaning and exterior maintenance.

In order to get a job contract with the mart, all contractors and engineers must go through a routine training seminar so they can be familiarized with LEED building standards and the mart's related guidelines.

"Not only does going green have a positive effect on our environment, but it makes sense economically," said MMPI national director of engineering Mark Bettin in a statement.

He added: "USGBC studies have shown green building practices guarantee a 30 percent energy savings, a 30 percent to 50 percent water savings and a 50 percent to 97 percent waste savings. Additionally, we are providing a value-added service to our tenant and employees by offering a comfortable, healthy [working environment that] will ultimately increase productivity."

Keeping the mart green has to be a constant team effort. This means all tenants need to stay involved. Maurer added: "Merchandise Mart's tenants have been great partners in our endeavor to achieve LEED-EB certification. They have embraced green building initiatives and have helped improve building performance and minimize our impact on the environment."

Many tenants are going for or have achieved what is known as LEED-CI (*commercial interiors*) certification for their showrooms.

The Milliken Contract showroom is the most recent to achieve the LEED-CI gold certification in the mart. Milliken has been reusing packing materials since 1900. In 1960, Milliken mandated that the company be responsible in its use of natural resources in order to reduce its environmental impact.

Merchandise Mart was built by national retailer Marshall Field & Co. and first opened its doors in May 1930. Vornado Realty Trust acquired the mart and MMPI in 1998. MMPI has 17 properties in eight cities and comprises 10 million square feet of space. MMPI's president is Christopher Kennedy. He is the grandson of Joseph P. Kennedy.

Founded in 1993, the USBGC is a non-profit composed of leaders from across the building industry. They are working to advance buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work. Its mission is primarily driven by the LEED rating system.

The council is as diverse as the clients it serves. These include building owners and end users, real estate developers, facility managers, architects, designers, engineers, general contractors, subcontractors, product and building system manufacturers, government agencies and non-profits. People from every area participate in the LEED certification system.

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