

# Painting the Town Green the Making of Greenbuild 2009

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## Highlights

The U.S. Green Building Council's annual convention, Greenbuild, is one of the greenest events in the country. This is the story of how Greenbuild came together in 2009 — and how it changed the way Phoenix delivers its event services.



**Whether it's Chicago, Boston, or Phoenix, when the U.S. Green Building Council comes to town for its annual convention, it leaves a green legacy in its wake.**

The Greenbuild International Conference and Exposition, the U.S. Green Building Council's annual convention, has been honored as one of the greenest meetings in the country, and its dedication to the environment extends to every vendor and partner. Greenbuild 2009, held November 11-13 in Phoenix, was a great example □ from the cleaning-service worker who dived into the dumpster to make sure the recyclables were clean, to the chef who found locally grown produce, to the convention center staff who hired the composting haulers.

The 2009 conference also marked a new step for USGBC when it announced minimum green standards for its exhibitors, something unheard of in the meetings industry. The

standards go into effect this year, November 17-19, in Chicago.

□ We can come in and demand from cities and vendors, □ Do this or we are not going to work with you, □ but it's more important to make sure everyone is in it together and there is a partnership, □ says Kimberly Lewis. Lewis is vice president of conferences and events at Washington, D.C.-based USGBC, the organization that developed and administers the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification program. In addition, USGBC is the only organization to have received the IMEX-GMIC Green Meetings Award three times. Here's how Greenbuild came together in Phoenix.

## Phoenix Promises and Then Delivers

Only seven years old, Greenbuild is a success story that reflects the booming interest in all things green. Greenbuild is the world's largest conference and expo dedicated to green building. The event launched in 2002 with modest results □ about 4,000 attendees and 200 exhibitors. By 2007, it attracted 28,000 delegates, a show record. Show attendees include developers, architects, engineers, and builders, while the exhibitors include energy experts; construction companies; and the manufacturers of flooring, bath and light fixtures, paint, and windows.

In 2009 in Phoenix, Greenbuild had 27,373 attendees and 1,800 exhibitors. □ It was a down economy and we would have been happy with 20,000. We got 27,373 □ pretty much equal to the previous year □ and we went from 1,400 to 1,800 exhibits, □ says Lewis.

When USGBC selected Phoenix four years ago, the news that the expanded Phoenix Convention Center would be LEED-certified was a plus, as was the 20-mile light-rail system that was scheduled to open in 2009. □ We're not going to sign a city unless they are committed to our mission, □ Lewis says. □ Phoenix said they were committed to the new building being certified, they were committed to light rail, and they came through. □

## Ramped-Up Recycling

The city worked closely with Greenbuild to maximize waste diversion, especially at the Phoenix Convention Center. □ We obviously recycle here at the convention center, but Greenbuild wanted to bring in their sorted-recycling program, which meant that we had to work closely with our event staff, our catering company, and with our public works department, □ says John Chan, director of the convention center.

Specifically, Greenbuild brought in 152 four-compartment bins □ with receptacles for recyclables and food waste or compost □ and set them up in the facility, replacing the existing bins. Rubbermaid Commercial Products, an event sponsor, donated the bins.

□ I walked the show in Boston [in 2008] and thought □ why not give them a more standardized look with our recycling station, as well as give them something they can take with them from show to show, □ □ says Jarret Chirafisi, product manager and sustainability team leader at Winchester, Va.-based Rubbermaid. The bins were a sustainable solution for Greenbuild and great exposure for Rubbermaid.

To staff the bins, Greenbuild hired hundreds of college interns who assisted attendees with what to throw where. When the bins were full, convention center personnel sorted the commingled recyclables in the back of the house and sent them to the loading dock to be hauled away.

The cleaning-services vendor, United Services Co., had its employees dive into dumpsters to pull out recyclables that didn't belong. "Our job is first to make sure that when the bulk trash gets to the loading dock and it's ready to be thrown into the dumpster, it is separated by categories," says Raymond Santos, senior vice president of national operations at United Services. Thirty-three tons of aluminum and plastic were recycled, plus 24 tons of cardboard.

"They basically made us look like the heroes," says Jenny Burr, vice president, account management, at Champion Exposition Services, Boston, the general services contractor for Greenbuild. "They really stepped it up and they took it very seriously."

## Hotels Get Involved

The commitment to recycling extended to the convention hotels.

"All of the facilities we use – the convention center, the hotels – must sign minimum green contract language," Lewis says.

It was more challenging to get all the hotels to comply in Phoenix than it was at the sites of the previous two meetings – Chicago (2007) and Boston (2008). Chicago had made a big push to have hotels achieve their "Green Seal," which is a national program that awards a seal of approval to all things green; Boston has a state certification for green hotels that many properties already had earned.

"All cities are different," Lewis says. "For many Phoenix (hotels), this was their first step in sustainability. We would love to see that legacy continue afterwards."

And it is happening at one of the hotels in the room block, the Arizona Biltmore. For Greenbuild, Biltmore placed recycling bins in the lobbies and common spaces on all floors, and the initiative has become permanent, says Becky Blaine, Biltmore's public relations and marketing manager. The property also donates about 600 pounds of food scraps per week to the Phoenix Herpetological Society, which uses it to feed reptiles.

## Careful Composting

Prior to Greenbuild, the convention center did not have a composting program in place, so to meet Greenbuild's requirements, facility staff came up with a plan.

First, they found a local farm that would take the compost. Then they worked with the city's public works department to ensure that the contracted trash hauler took away the compost and brought it to the farm, Chan says. Greenbuild diverted 12.3 tons of compost.

There were increased labor costs for separation and for the compost hauls, but "the composting program that we put in place for the event is something we'd like to look at long term," Chan says. "At a minimum, we at least have a greater awareness of those things we can be doing to be more sustainable."

## Local, Organic Food

While the convention center worked with Greenbuild to reduce waste, the food service vendor, Aramark-owned Aventura, exceeded Greenbuild's requirements for locally grown

and organic foods.

We want to have at least 25 percent local and organic food,  Lewis says.  But this year the chef, Jesus Cibrian, was unbelievable. He came into our pre-con meeting and said he was committed to going beyond the minimum requirements.

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