A Whitepaper About CSI's GreenFormat™

Executive Summary

GreenFormat is an information organizing tool developed by members of the Construction Specifications Institute (CSI) to communicate the sustainability features of building materials, products and systems. CSI recommends that industry stakeholders follow GreenFormat to structure this kind of information, whether they are information providers such as building product manufacturers, or information users such as building owners, designers, facility managers or contractors. There are numerous specific advantages and potential benefits to using GreenFormat.

Background

There are no precise definitions for 'green' or 'sustainability' but many experts agree that since all human activity is accompanied by impacts on the environment, sustainability is about doing the things today that take care of human needs while at the same time not endangering the environment we pass on to future generations. It involves the way we integrate the environmental, economic, and social aspects of our lives with our habitation of the planet. It also involves integrating design approaches, so as to consider site, energy, water, materials, indoor environments and other similar aspects of the way in which society provides and uses buildings. In theory, these things must be accomplished so as to assure the best performance of the built environment, while at the same time limiting its impact.

GreenFormat is a voluntary information structure for sustainability-related information, organized by CSI MasterFormat® divisions, in a specification-friendly format. It is designed to be a consistent means of communicating the sustainability features of building materials,

products, systems and technologies. GreenFormat addresses the information needs of numerous stakeholders in the construction industry including design professionals (architects, engineers, specifiers, and interior designers), suppliers (manufacturers, dealers and distributors), and other influencers including building owners, constructors and regulators. Anyone connected with design or construction in the built environment can use and benefit from CSI's GreenFormat.

Sustainability

'Green' and 'sustainability' have become very confusing terms and there are now hundreds of players involved with this subject from theorists, to design practitioners, to code bodies and to entities that label products and certify compliance with green building standards. There are rating systems that seek to reduce the environmental impact of buildings through improvements in energy performance and other means like USGBC's LEED® and Green Globes® from the Green Building Initiative. Other rating systems include DOE's Energy Star Program and ASHRAE 189. The point is that there are many aspects to deal with when it comes to sustainability, and as more guidelines, rating systems, codes and standards have emerged, it is getting more difficult to keep up.

Depending on who is looking for sustainability related information and what their objectives are, they may have different priorities. Should a manufacturer's 'green' claims about their product apply? Should criteria favored by environmental activists, sometimes at odds with manufacturers, be considered? Should single-attribute criteria like recycled content be used instead of comprehensive multi-attribute life cycle assessment data? Should manufacturers who have made commitments to reduce energy use, waste, and pollution be rewarded by getting specified or should other combinations of criteria be considered? Or is it best that the person needing the information, whether they are a design practitioner, a building owner, a material supplier, or other construction industry professional, decide based on what is most important to them? That's the approach that GreenFormat takes. GreenFormat seeks to provide categories for all kinds of information that is relevant to sustainability. Providers get to

supply information they feel is important and relevant, and users of that information get to decide how to use it and to make their own choices.

History of GreenFormat

GreenFormat was first released at USGBC's Greenbuild in 2006 and it was initially used as a CSI-recommended format designed for product information reporting by manufacturers. Users soon found it helpful as a product comparison tool and this led to the GreenFormat.com database released in 2008. Under this plan, manufacturers paid for product information listings structured according to GreenFormat, while users accessed that information at no cost to them. While that plan achieved some success, various complexities and the cost of keeping the website content up to date suggested to CSI that a different approach should be taken, so in 2012 CSI began a shift from a web-based product selection tool to a comprehensive product information formatting tool. CSI's goal is to support the use of GreenFormat by industry professionals as the single best way to organize, request, and use product sustainability-related information. This is consistent with other widely used and universally accepted CSI information structures such as MasterFormat®, SectionFormat®, and UniFormat®.

Using GreenFormat

It is important to note that GreenFormat is not a specific information product. It is simply a format upon which a wide variety of product information tools may be based. This might include but not be limited to product search and comparison tools, web pages, data bases, product data sheets, presentation tools, and potentially many others.

GreenFormat is by its very nature 'specification friendly.' It is organized to correspond with Parts 2 and 3 of CSI's SectionFormat, the standard for organizing specification information. When design professionals write specifications they include many 'salient features' as project requirements. Each of those salient features has a required value associated with it. For example, a typical single-attribute feature of a product might be "Recycled Content" and the required "Value" sought by the specifier might be '50 percent.' GreenFormat contains many

salient features applicable to the sustainability aspects of products, and manufacturers can then supply the values applicable to their own products. The specifier can incorporate those features and values in the Part 2 description of the products they are specifying. Information regarding the installation and maintenance of products can be included in Part 3.

GreenFormat is a useful guide for the publishing of product information by manufacturers. Just as MasterFormat provides a uniform hierarchy and order for work results, GreenFormat provides a uniform hierarchy and order for product information. It fulfills the user's needs for product data evaluation, data filing, and product comparisons. GreenFormat can become the basis for a standard product sustainability questionnaire and response format.

Design Professionals and GreenFormat

Why should design professionals use GreenFormat? This group typically consists of architects, engineers, specifiers, and interior designers. One thing to note about them is that they typically have many choices. They may choose among alternative technologies such as different materials, other types of products, or alternative systems; in other words, different ways to build things. They can also choose among alternative brands within those technologies. Since all human activity impacts the environment the goal of the design team is generally to choose products that perform as intended, at an acceptable cost, with the lowest overall environmental impact. GreenFormat helps make this possible.

This group can save time and money in accessing information about sustainable products and materials. They can protect their design intent, making it easier to enforce product specification decisions, which almost always results in happier clients. GreenFormat can help in completing projects faster and with better control during the design, specification and construction phases. By using GreenFormat to support the product deliberation and selection process, exposure to liability may be reduced, and so will information management headaches. Using GreenFormat shows support for the important mission of CSI and to improve and enhance communication in

our industry. In simplest terms, GreenFormat can help make a difference in reducing the impact of design on the environment.

Suppliers and GreenFormat

How can suppliers benefit from using GreenFormat? The Supplier group consists of manufacturers, sales representatives, dealers, distributors, trade associations and other entities related to products and materials. They typically seek to promote their product, and to influence the selection and specification process. Their goal is to inform and educate the designer by supporting their decision-making process, and to compete effectively in the marketplace.

This group can save time and money, protecting their company's interests through clearer, better and less costly communications. GreenFormat makes it easier for design professionals to find products, to choose them from among many alternatives they will consider, and to use the product by specifying it. GreenFormat is designed for better communication, so overall there should be a better success rate by winning more projects than competitors who use old ways to communicate. All manufacturers like to keep their customers satisfied and to encourage them to come back and buy again. This in turn keeps the company's managers, owners, and shareholders happy. And by using GreenFormat they can make a difference, reducing the impact of their products on the built environment.

Supporting GreenFormat

Right now, manufacturers can begin to organize all their product sustainability-related information and provide it to their audience of information consumers following CSI's GreenFormat. The specifier audience has confidence in CSI and they recognize the importance of clear and efficient communication so they can make the best choices. One important way to help them get their job done better is to help them specify products by using CSI's GreenFormat as an information management tool.

Right now, design professionals can ask suppliers to provide product information to them following CSI's GreenFormat structure. Manufacturers are very interested in how designers think and they like to know how best to communicate with them. They will appreciate guidance on the best ways to give design professionals what they need.

For More Information

For more information about GreenFormat, or to download the current version, visit www.csinet.com/greenformat

CSI staff member Christopher Gummo is available to assist with inquiries. He can be reached in the Alexandria, Virginia headquarters office by E-mail at cgummo@csinet.org or by telephone at (703) 706-4737.

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