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Mayors unite on the 'green' front

Updated 2/1/2007 3:27 PM ET

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY

Pittsburgh, once the gritty center of steel manufacturing, now boasts the first "green" convention center and one of the world's largest environmentally sustainable buildings: the David L. Lawrence Convention Center.

On the banks of the Allegheny River, the building taps an underground aquifer for drinking water and recycles water used in its bathrooms. Roof skylights and glass walls produce diffused light and uniform temperatures to light and heat the building naturally. The center is a striking monument to Pittsburgh's efforts to transform itself.

LIST: Cities sign Climate Protection Agreement

Pittsburgh also may soon give developers a "density bonus" if they build similar Earth-friendly projects. That could mean buildings 20% higher or larger than zoning allows.

Going green can transform the city's reputation, says Councilman William Peduto: "Nothing will be able to shed the image of Pittsburgh as a smoky city better than that."

Pittsburgh is one of dozens of cities joining the fight against global warming, taking actions designed not only to protect the environment but save money by boosting efficiency.

As the USA comes off its warmest year on record, cities are changing ordinances to encourage construction of environmentally sustainable homes and offices, buying hybrid vehicles for their fleets and giving fast approval to green projects. Many require that all public buildings comply with environmental design standards established by the U.S. Green Building Council, a coalition of building industry groups.

Almost 375 mayors of large and small cities from 50 states and the District of Columbia have signed the U.S. Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. It was reached after the United States decided not to participate in the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty to limit "greenhouse gas" emissions that took effect in 2005. Mayors call for a \$4 billion federal grant to help cities fight global warming.

"The fact that mayors have really embraced it is a strong signal to the country that this is a very important issue," says Rick Fedrizzi, president of the Green Building Council, which set up the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards almost seven years ago. "Mayors do this for their cities not as window dressing but to prove that their cities are well managed."

Support builds

The political momentum rises as more Americans experience unusual weather patterns and environmentally sensitive designs

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and materials become more mainstream. President Bush, who once expressed doubt that global warming was a major problem, cited "the serious challenge of global climate change" in his State of the Union address last week.

"There are real practical things that can be done," says Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, who launched the mayors' push last February. He says cities can show that tackling global warming won't damage the economy, a reason Bush cited for not signing the Kyoto pact. "We now have literally 375 laboratories," Nickels says.

Cities take many approaches:

- Boston** last month became the first major city to require green construction for all private buildings that cover at least 50,000 square feet.
- Seattle** boasts the first electric utility to eliminate all greenhouse-gas emissions.
- Houston** Councilman Peter Brown is pushing for incentives that encourage building where solar energy can best be captured.
- Sugar Land, Texas**, a fast-growing Houston suburb, is converting traffic lights to light-emitting diode bulbs. "We're saving literally hundreds of thousands of dollars," Mayor David Wallace says. "It comes down not just to quality of life but economic development. ... We reduce taxes."

Green can mean green

Pittsburgh, home to major companies (PPG Industries) and universities (Carnegie Mellon), is one of several cities repositioning themselves as centers of "green" technology, tackling everything from research and development to manufacturing and marketing.

"When I look at the green movement, I see a product, a market," Peduto says. "We have the opportunity because of our hillsides, our topography and manufacturing base to take it to the next level ... to produce the product."

States and cities recognize that there's money to be made in the green movement, and those still struggling to adjust to the downturn in manufacturing are joining the movement.

In southeastern Michigan, wind farms are being built that could generate up to 30% of the state's energy needs. Entrepreneurs are converting old auto-parts factories to produce solar panels.

On the western side of the state in Grand Rapids, capital of leading furniture-makers, companies such as Herman Miller and Steelcase are producing eco-friendly furniture from desks to chairs and cabinets. They're reducing the use of hardwoods from forests that are poorly managed and even designing furniture that can be easily taken apart and recycled.

Syracuse, N.Y., has long adapted to economic change. It went from salt manufacturing to being the typewriter capital to the city where TVs were made. Now it's home to the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems, a consortium of businesses and universities aiming to develop green technologies.

The center, which focuses on research, product testing and marketing, and Syracuse University helped five entrepreneurs who developed a heating and cooling unit that's cleaner, quieter and uses less energy. They refined it, tested it, obtained a patent and marketed it. New Climate Air Quality Systems had its first sale last summer.

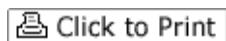
"Clean and green technology has become the great hope for cities and states across the USA," says Joel Makower, executive editor of GreenBiz.com, an information center for green building. "Mayors and governors see it not only as a means of creating new businesses and jobs but also skilled and desirable jobs."

Green building has become so popular that cities are clamoring for bragging rights. Grand Rapids boasts the most LEED-certified buildings per capita of any U.S. city. Pittsburgh says it has "more square feet of certified green buildings than any other city in America."

Fedrizzi of the Green Building Council doesn't argue any of the claims. "I applaud every city that says, 'We're the greenest,' " he says. "Every one of them should want to be the greenest and should want to outdo each other."

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