

Edited by Sara Elliott, Associate Editor

WATER CONSERVATION

RESNET Develops Residential Water Efficiency Rating System

The Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET) is set to launch the Water Efficiency Rating Index (WER), a first-of-its-kind metric that will show consumers, at a glance, how efficiently a home uses water.

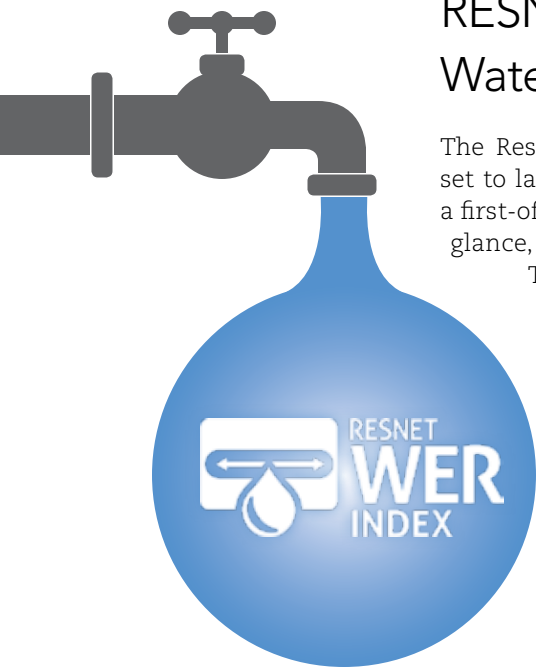
The index assigns a numeric score to a house based on its water usage performance. It was developed by RESNET, which joined forces with the Natural Resources Defense Council and a coalition of water efficiency experts, home builders, environmental organizations, and home energy professionals. Leading RESNET's efforts to establish the WER Index is a committee that includes Jacob Atalla of KB Home, Ed Osann of the Natural Resources Defense Council, and Jonah Schein of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency WaterSense Program.

According to RESNET, the WER Index will work in the same way as the Home Energy Rating System (HERS). The baseline score of the WER Index will also be 100, with a lower score indicating a more water-efficient home.

"A numeric water score will help homebuyers understand the water efficiency of a house the same way car shoppers use fuel economy labels to inform their purchases," Osann said in a statement by RESNET. "The score will help expand green building programs and encourage new rebates and tax incentives for water-efficient products in new and existing homes. Consumers who 'know the score' will save water and money when they buy a house or renovate their existing home."

"In many parts of the nation, water is fast becoming an ever increasingly expensive commodity," said Steve Baden, executive director of RESNET, in the statement. "At least one county in every state in this country experiences a drought each year. There is clearly a need for a system to rate a home's efficiency in water use. The WER Index Score will allow homebuyers to know how efficiently water is being used in the homes they are considering buying. It will also provide an opportunity for home builders to monetize the efficiency of their homes in the same fashion that the HERS Index does for energy efficiency."

An American National Standards Institute consensus standard development process will be used in developing the new rating system. RESNET hopes to have the WER Index ready for use across the U.S. by the end of 2015. **PB**



GREEN BUILDING

NGBS Green Certification Program Marks Milestone

Home Innovation Research Labs (HIRL) recently announced the certification of its 50,000th home under the National Green Building Standard (NGBS) certification program. Built by North Carolina-based builder Saussy Burbank, the milestone home was verified by Matt Dovenbarger of Southern Energy Management. Reaching the 50,000 milestone was celebrated during the 10th Annual Green Home Tour sponsored by the Green Home Builders of the Triangle.

Joe Robinson, Saussy Burbank's Raleigh division president, cites the company's dedication to providing energy-efficient homes that use good-quality, sustainable materials. Saussy Burbank opts to have all its homes NGBS Green Certified, explains Robinson, to give homeowners peace of mind, and for the builder to maintain its high standards.

The NGBS certification process strives to provide lower energy costs and



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environmental sustainability, as well as improved air quality and a healthier living environment.

“When we launched the NGBS Green Certification program in January 2009 in the midst of the housing downturn, it may have seemed counterintuitive to voluntarily build homes to an above-code green standard and pay to have those homes scrutinized under a rigorous third-party certification protocol,” says HIRL president and CEO Michael Luzier in a press release. “But forward-thinking builders didn’t see it that way at all. They saw NGBS Green as a way to emerge from the downturn by building better, higher-performing, and more marketable homes—homes that smart consumers were seeking and continue to seek today, as evidenced by the volume of homes we’ve already certified and, more than ever, [that are] in our certification pipeline.”

The program serves as an opportunity for builders to enter green home building and to discover how practical it is to build green. It has also helped builders of all sizes compete in their respective markets by providing comprehensively green homes to mainstream buyers across the country.

HIRL is currently reviewing the 2015 version of the NGBS rating system to ensure that the program stays up to date on new building practices and technologies.

To honor the significant milestone of the NGBS certification and to kick off the Green Home Tour, HIRL hosted a presentation and celebration in Briar Chapel, a master planned community in Chapel Hill, N.C. The event was just one of several that the organization will host over the course of a few months to highlight the diversity of home types, buyers, and locations that fall under the umbrella of the NGBS Green national certification program.

Other events will include military housing projects, affordable single-family and multifamily projects, remodeled

homes, and urban high-rise buildings.

The NGBS has changed a great deal since HIRL certified its first home in 2009. According to Michelle Desiderio, vice president of innovation services at HIRL, some of the modifications reflect how thinking surrounding sustainable living has evolved.

For example, lot design, whether for single-family or multifamily housing, has changed to include elements similar to a community garden so that residents can purchase local food.

“Universal design is another thing that’s changed since we first offered NGBS certification,” Desiderio told *Professional Builder*. “Aging in place is important for a family so that they don’t have to change homes years down the road because they’ve aged out of it.”

Other changes made to the NGBS standards include car sharing, a 15 percent increase in the energy-efficiency baseline, and advances in technology, including energy management devices and systems. Building envelope changes are also reflected in newer iterations of the standards. As other technologies advance and become more widely available and affordable, they, too, will be added to the NGBS standards. **PB**

DEMOGRAPHICS

Report Sheds Light on Millennials and City Living

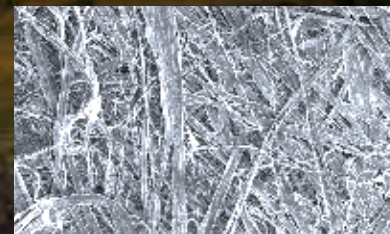
Millennials are flocking to cities, but a study published last month by the Urban Land Institute (ULI) challenges the notion that throngs of them are living at the urban core. Saving money remains a top priority, translating to living with roommates in more affordable,

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less central areas, or with parents.

The study, titled "Gen Y and Housing: What They Want and Where They Want It," was conducted in November 2014

and is based on a nationwide sampling of 1,270 people aged 19 to 36. The study explores what impact the Great Recession continues to have on the




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lives of Generation Y when it comes to housing and employment prospects.

Only 13 percent of Millennials live in or in close proximity to downtowns. More than half (63 percent) live in less centrally located neighborhoods or in the suburbs. Half of Millennials are renters who pay a median rent of \$925 per month. Almost a quarter (21 percent) live at home, and of that group, 42 percent moved back in with their parents after living on their own. Multi-generational living is familiar to this age group: 14 percent reside in households where three generations of family live together.

Renting is still a compelling choice for Millennials because it is low maintenance and offers greater flexibility. In spite of the sacrifices that members of this generation are making in order to afford living on their own, they still show a marked preference for walkability, not needing to own a car, and living within easy reach of entertainment, shops, and gathering places.

The study suggests that "the current trend of urbanizing suburbs will present lucrative opportunities for the development community for years to come," says M. Leanne Lachman, president of Lachman Associates, the ULI trustee who co-authored the study with Deborah Brett, founder of Deborah L. Brett & Associates, in a statement released by ULI.

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“This is a generation that places a high value on work-life balance and flexibility. They will switch housing and jobs as frequently as necessary to improve their quality of

life.” The ULI survey portrays Millennials as optimistic about advancement in the years ahead, regarding both where they live and the jobs they will hold. Though



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less than half feel that owning a home is a good investment, 70 percent expect to be homeowners by the year 2020, counting on using money they've saved for a down payment.

As the number of Millennials who want to own homes continues to grow, this generation will be an essential component of the housing recovery, say several sources, including the State of the Nation's Housing report, published in 2014 by the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University.

Despite recent housing industry growth, sales have yet to fully recover from the Great Recession, and approximately 2.1 million adults continue to live with their parents while student loan balances increased by \$114 billion in 2013, according to the Joint Center's report. But the report also projects that a rise in incomes and greater access to credit will lead to households between the ages of 24 and 34 accounting for some 46 percent of the first-time homebuyer market.

Chris Herbert, research director at the Joint Center for Housing Studies, points out that the housing recovery is following the same path as the broader economy. Provided that the overall economy shows slow but steady improvement, Herbert says, the housing industry should parallel this trend. **PB**

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