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Building Green – Can We Rise to the Challenge?

*by **Ir. Stephen Phang***
Chairman of Building Services Technical Division

AT *the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 at Copenhagen last month, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak announced that Malaysia has agreed to reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by up to 40% by 2020 compared with 2005 levels, subject to assistance from developed countries in the form of technology transfer and adequate financing.* ***The Star, May 1, 2010***

Going green is today's buzzword in the built environment. Everywhere we go, Eco-friendly development is springing up. Whether it is in big cities or small towns, many builders are deciding to go green.

"Building green," is the catch-word for all environmentally concerned clients with a deep desire to reduce their carbon footprint to the belief that going green will appeal to their customers. With this strong urge to go green, builders face challenges to comply with green certification and we as engineers, must make their green certification a reality.

However, most of us must count the cost of going green. One thing for sure, going green requires a diligence that is sometimes hard to keep up. Furthermore, we are currently short of engineers and with the introduction of green concept in building, more often than not, building services engineers would double up as Green Engineers.

For each green project, it requires a unique "team" to plan, design, construct, and maintain the project. Far from being a single activity, the process is a feat of multitasking. The increasing complexity of construction projects gives rise to the need for Building Service "Green" engineers to be trained in all phases of the project's life-cycle and develop an appreciation of the building as an advanced technological system requiring close integration of many sub-systems and their individual components, including sustainability.

The Building Services "Green" engineer must consider the concept and technical specifications to fit into the legal framework governing the property. Concurrently, the building services "Green" engineer must also ensure the technologies and resources conform to local building authority regulations and codes of practice. These include governmental regulations on the use of property, and obligations that are created in the process of construction.

The development of the "Building Green" concept would require many hours of meetings between the "Green Engineer" with the project design team including the client, architects, interior designers, surveyors, civil engineers, quantity surveyors and structural engineers. He or she would then have to translate the concept into engineering drawings and specifications.

The Building Service "Green" engineer must also consider the environmental impact of the job in addition to the common elements in transforming the concept into built environment including, among others, the successful scheduling, budgeting, site safety, availability of materials, logistics, inconvenience to the public caused by construction delays, preparing tender documents, financial and legal considerations.

In spite of the towering challenge, over 100 engineers have graduated to become green facilitators and over 1000 engineers have undergone the Green Building Index Course since the inception of Green Building Index. Many more engineers are still waiting in line. Indeed, despite the many challenges in going green, we, Malaysian Engineers are rising up to the challenge in making green building a reality in this country. ■