

Green building requires holistic approach

With the current water shortage in the Western Cape having encouraged efficient water use and proactive ways of saving water, building industry representative the Joint Building Contracts Committee (JBCC) CEO Uwe Putlitz says a similar attitude should be pursued regarding green building in the building industry.

This entails designing a building in a more efficient manner, and in a way that maximises available space, using appropriate (possibly recycled) materials, reducing labour and making better use of construction equipment, he says. “Based on this, other details would then need to be mapped out, for example, how to get daylight and ventilation into a big building, and leaving space in the centre of a tall building for stairs/lifts/escalators,” he notes. Putlitz compliments the design element of the building industry in South Africa, adding that the country’s building regulations are very competent in terms of design specifications. He emphasises that green building should not be regarded as a separate entity from the rest of a building project but rather as an integral part of the entire project.

While green building is “largely common sense”, executing some elements does require the relevant skills set and knowledge, Putlitz adds. For example, when pursuing a building that is more efficient in terms of energy and water consumption, it must be insulated, such as building a cavity wall. The performance of such a wall may be enhanced by filling the gap between two skins of brickwork using insulation.

He says this knowledge has resulted in the emergence of green consultants and, while they understand the necessary requirements and undertake calculations for various services and products, parties should be wary of fly-by-nighters who are not knowledgeable. Putlitz notes that attitude and know-how work hand in hand. For example, if a building collects rainwater for use, the correct systems need to be in place to ensure that it flows from the rainwater tank to, for example, a toilet cistern. If this system is not automated, this will require switching on a pump every day, which necessitates the willingness to do so. Once a building has been built, it must be used to its economic life to prevent waste.

Following this, Putlitz says the manner in which a building is demolished at the end of its life must be properly managed and executed. While outlined in building contracts, this element is often overlooked, he indicates.

He encourages reusing building materials, bemoaning the “very wasteful way of doing things” when buildings are demolished and all the materials thrown away. Although waste removal is not included in building contracts, Putlitz indicates that the JBCC encourages contractors to be less wasteful, which requires the correct attitude and willingness to comply.

The biggest challenge for the JBCC currently is emerging building contractors, he states. While these contractors are good builders, they have not been trained in implementing the correct building regulations and are, therefore, unaware of how to build in accordance with these. This also affects green building, as it is grounded in these regulations, with emerging contractors not always knowledgeable in this regard.

Similarly, emerging contractors often struggle to price and submit competitive tenders, he mentions.

The JBCC publishes three building contracts for the building industry for buildings: for use by the employer, contractor and subcontractor. These contracts are applicable to new buildings, as well as maintenance or alterations to existing buildings.

A building contract is a legal contract between the employer and the contractor. By following the procedures in the contract, it also becomes a management tool – and so saves time and may avoid disputes. Putlitz indicates that national body the Construction Industry Development Board recognises the JBCC's contracts as suitable for use by organs of the State. He concludes that building contracts must be understood by and be fair to all parties, balancing the risks among them.

EDITED BY: ZANDILE MAVUSO

CREAMER MEDIA SENIOR DEPUTY EDITOR: FEATURES