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CoTE's Cool Tools Garners Global Audience

Steven Kismohr, AIA, and Vuk Vujovic, Assoc. AIA, present the Committee on the Environment's "Cool Tools" at the World Sustainable Building Conference 2008 this September in Melbourne, Australia. The conference, held every three years, brings together sustainability experts from around the world with attendees hailing from more than 36 countries.

Kismohr and Vujovic join such notable sustainability pioneers and experts as Nils Larsson, executive director of the International Initiative for a Sustainable Built Environment and a proponent of region-specific energy performance rating systems; William Rees, Ph.D., credited with creating the "ecological footprint" concept; and Rick Fedrizi, president, CEO and founding chairman of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Kismohr, LEED AP, whose title at Harley Ellis Devereaux is green champion, served as chairman for the 2007 CoTE Subcommittee on Carbon Reduction Strategies, the group responsible for creating Cool Tools. Serving as co-chairs were Vujovic, LEED AP, director of sustainable design at Legat Architects, and Robert Vagnieres, Jr., AIA, principal of Robert C. Vagnieres Jr. & Associates.

In 2006, Sadhu Johnston, who at the time was the city's environmental commissioner, "was interested in working with us, but he said we have to do something," Vujovic said. This was not a new partnership; AIA Chicago and Chicago's Department of the Environment have collaborated on improving the environment since 1999. However, Vujovic credits Ed Mazria, FAIA, and his 2030 Challenge for sparking local interest with an emphasis on action. Johnston reiterated this desire. This impetus for results and the partnership with the city led to the creation of Cool Tools, a Chicago-centric guide to reducing a building's carbon emissions.

"Cool Tools has to fit local data, so people can relate to this," Vujovic explains. The guide—a 10-page, downloadable document—offers users specific strategies for reducing carbon emissions. The CoTE subcommittee partnered with the Chicago Center for Neighborhood Technology to populate the matrix with data specific to Chicago.

The carbon reduction strategies are divided into four categories according to the strategies' estimated implementation time frame, from immediate to long-term. There are no-cost immediate tasks such as "turn off lights when they are not required;" and low-cost, mid-term implementation tasks like "mandate use of energy modeling to design building system."

High-cost, long-term tasks include "integrate building's energy production system," a strategy recommending the use of photovoltaic shading, geothermal wells, and integrated solar electric with solar water heating systems.

Vujovic, who presented "Integrating Sustainable Design into Educational Buildings" at the World SB 2005 in Tokyo, looks forward to presenting to the World SB08's attendees what he believes is the first city-specific tool available. Along with the presentation, Vujovic and Kismohr have authored an accompanying paper to be published and distributed to conference attendees.

What's next after the big trip down under? These carbon emission wranglers aren't stopping there. The members of CoTE plan to expand the Cool Tools matrix into an interactive web site.

They are also considering other extensions.

"A culture shift is going on," Vujovic says. "Now school districts are saying, 'How can we green our own school district?'" He and others on the committee envision an atmosphere where competition to be green improves industry as a whole. He would like to see an incentive program similar to what the Tokyo government offers businesses.

"In Japan, the government, industry and academia are better integrated," he says. "They sit down and figure out how to be more energy efficient and they reward businesses for energy efficiency. Everyone competes, they reward one business owner and the whole industry moves forward a notch." He'd like to see the city of Chicago adopt similar reward programs.

To explore the Cool Tools matrix, go to www.aiachicago.org/cote.asp.

By Lara Brown