



Keep SITES in your sight

The Sustainable Sites Initiative's (SITES) two-year pilot program runs from June 2010 to June 2012. Feedback from the more than 150 participating projects will be used to revise the SITES final rating system.

At this stage of its development, it's difficult to gauge the impact of SITES on the professional landscape/lawn service industry. It's likely there will be little effect, at least until the release of the final rating system in 2013. But once the rating system is in place, things could change — significantly.

SITES, simply explained, is attempting to do for outdoor urban environments what the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) building rating system is doing with the building trades. Even if you have just a passing knowledge of LEED, you know that it has had a profound “greening” effect on construction. By the end of 2009, commercial ventures included more than 12,200 projects either registered or certified. The commercial category is the largest LEED category, followed distantly by retail projects (4,398). The number of registrants or certifications for the LEED Home program is much smaller and wasn't immediately available on its website. All in all, however, LEED is rapidly transforming the construction industry.

The goal of SITES is just as ambitious. It envisions sustainability and the very notion of landscapes in a much broader context than what most of us in the professional landscape/lawn service industry associate with the properties we design, install and maintain. In its view of landscapes, SITES includes parkland, transportation corridors, industrial sites, educational sites and government complexes — along with, of course, the commercial and residential properties that occupy our efforts.

A summary of the projects participating in the pilot program provides a reference for the scale of its goal. Pilot project types by percentage:

▶ 25% Open Space/Park;

- ▶ 20% Institutional/Educational;
- ▶ 15% Commercial;
- ▶ 13% Residential;
- ▶ 9% Transportation Corridor/Streetscape;
- ▶ 8% Open Space/Garden/Arboretum;
- ▶ 6% Government Complex;
- ▶ 3% Mixed Use;
- ▶ 1% Industrial

There are SITES projects in 34 U.S. States and several in Canada, Iceland and Spain. Approximately 25% of the projects involve properties of less than 1 acre, 26% are 1 to 5 acres, 40% are 6 to 100 acres, 8% are 101 to 500 acres and 1% are greater than 500 acres.

If you scan the descriptions of the more than 150 pilot projects, the names of familiar landscape companies appear. For example, The Brickman Group's Chicago-area project involves improving rainwater runoff quality, reducing potable water use, improving soil health and instituting sustainable management practices at the Hoffman Estates Marriott Hotel property. This is one of two SITES pilot projects partnering Brickman with Marriott. The second involves Brickman making similar landscape improvements to Marriott headquarters in Bethesda, MD.

In Portland, OR, the DeSantis Landscapes' Ash Creek House residential project converted a 7,500-sq.-ft. weed field adjacent to a small stream into a low-maintenance garden with native and adaptive plants. The project involves improving the quality and water-holding capacity of the soil at the residential greyfield, and collecting stormwater from the residence's roof for sub-soil distribution to the field.

Lupfer Landscaping in the Chicago area, Piedmont Landscape Contractors in Atlanta, and L.I.D. Landscapes and Nielsen Designs, LLC, Boulder, CO, are just a few of the other landscape professionals adding their names and efforts to SITES pilot projects. Their involvement suggests that they recognize the potential for SITES to become a transformative agent in our industry.