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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE

Sustainability: Inciting a Green Revolution



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Charles Dickens begins *A Tale of Two Cities*, his novel about the French Revolution, with the words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." The words come to mind as I follow the steady drumbeat of depressing news about rising oil prices, global warming, and the seeming inability of our policy makers to do much about either.

So what's the good or at least hopeful news?

I believe the price at the pump and the mounting scientific evidence of climate change are prompting a historic shift in public opinion at the grassroots level. The increased cost of energy affects everyone (including General Motors), and although the weather hasn't yet performed the instant doomsday deep freeze portrayed in the film *Day after Tomorrow*, it's clear that extreme weather is becoming the norm.


Accepting responsibility

Recognizing we've got a problem is the necessary precondition for action. The growing awareness comes at the very time architects are prepared to be an important part of the solution. After all, we know that building construction and operation account for about 48 percent of all energy used and consume many natural resources. We know that how we design and build can make a difference.


That message has gotten through, at least to the rank and file of our profession. Poll after poll of AIA members reveals that advocacy of sustainable architecture is a high member priority. AIA members want their profession and the organization that represents them to take a leadership role at the very time clients are sensing an historic intersection between what's smart and what's right.

So what is the AIA doing in fact to seize this opportunity? How are we giving shape to our values? Here's how the AIA's Public Policies—the statements of what we believe—read when describing the architect's responsibilities to all citizens of this planet:

1. "We are accountable for collaboration. Everything we do we do in cooperation with the expertise of others. Every design we create has an impact on all citizens.
2. "We are accountable to design the best possible built environment, to enrich

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Responsibility, and
Renewal" conference
22, in Los Angeles.

all lives, and...

3. "We are accountable to fully respect this unique planet on which we live, being ever mindful of its limited resources."

Wide range of actions

To earn the reputation as a leader in the pursuit of a sustainable ethic, the AIA is actively talking with a wide range of interests. AIA-sponsored roundtables are bringing together the banking community, government agencies, developers, the federal Environmental Protection Agency, and the Department of Energy. These roundtables provide a forum where the important work of designing a collaborative approach to policy recommendations can begin.

But the AIA has gone far beyond providing platforms for dialogue about sustainability:

Last fall, the AIA partnered with The Enterprise Foundation to develop new standards for "green" affordable housing. This program is providing half a billion dollars of new energy-efficient affordable housing, built with renewable resources, that takes into account site, public transportation, and mixed uses that build a welcome sense of community by facilitating personal interaction among a diverse population.

The AIA is continuing and expanding our highly successful and widely respected Regional/Urban Design Assistance Teams (R/UDATs), which serve communities of all sizes. What's new is a special emphasis on integrating conservation methodology into the proposed urban solutions that emerge.

Beginning this year, the AIA is offering Sustainability Design Assistance Teams (SDAT) to aid urban centers as they look at their overall approach to issues such as growth management, bioclimatic design and planning, co-generation, water harvesting, wastewater systems, biome parks and green spaces, public transportation efficiencies, alternative fuel vehicles, pedestrian friendly neighborhoods, and the issues associated with automobile dependent societies.

Last May, at the AIA National Convention in Las Vegas, the Presidents Forum resulted in a statement affirmed by 11 international architectural organization presidents agreeing "to give priority to the vital issue of climate change."

This month, July, the AIA is convening a Sustainability Standards Summit, the intent of which is to focus our profession on measurable standards to address these most important issues. In the meantime, the Committee on the Environment (COTE) continues to advocate among all architects the principles of design that benefit our energy and natural conservation efforts. The COTE's Environmental Design Awards program is now a decade old.

Sustainability is not an elective

That's just this past year. It's quite a list that continues to grow every month. America's architects through the AIA are stretching themselves to become significant players in forwarding the complex issues that surround the concept of sustainability. Some of the areas being addressed have to do with research and the practical applications of emerging knowledge. Some are issues of awareness that have to do with applying creatively and in new ways what we already know. Other issues challenge us to collaborate with partners to reach sustainable outcomes.

Nevertheless, regardless of how vigorously the AIA pursues the goal of sustainability, it's essential that every individual architect on every individual project make sustainability a top priority. In addition, our schools of architecture need to emphasize sustainability in every design charrette. Sustainability is not an elective; it must be core curriculum.

The AIA has made the commitment. Can we say the same for ourselves? Are we as individuals prepared to accept the responsibility that comes with the talent to create a built environment that leaves its footprint gently on the land? Together and only together will we be able to create a built environment that is in harmony with our planet. If we succeed—and I believe we have it in our power to do so—our success in partnership with others will usher in a revolution, a revolution far more wide-reaching, benevolent, and, yes, sustainable than the one chronicled in Dickens' novel nearly 150 years ago.

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