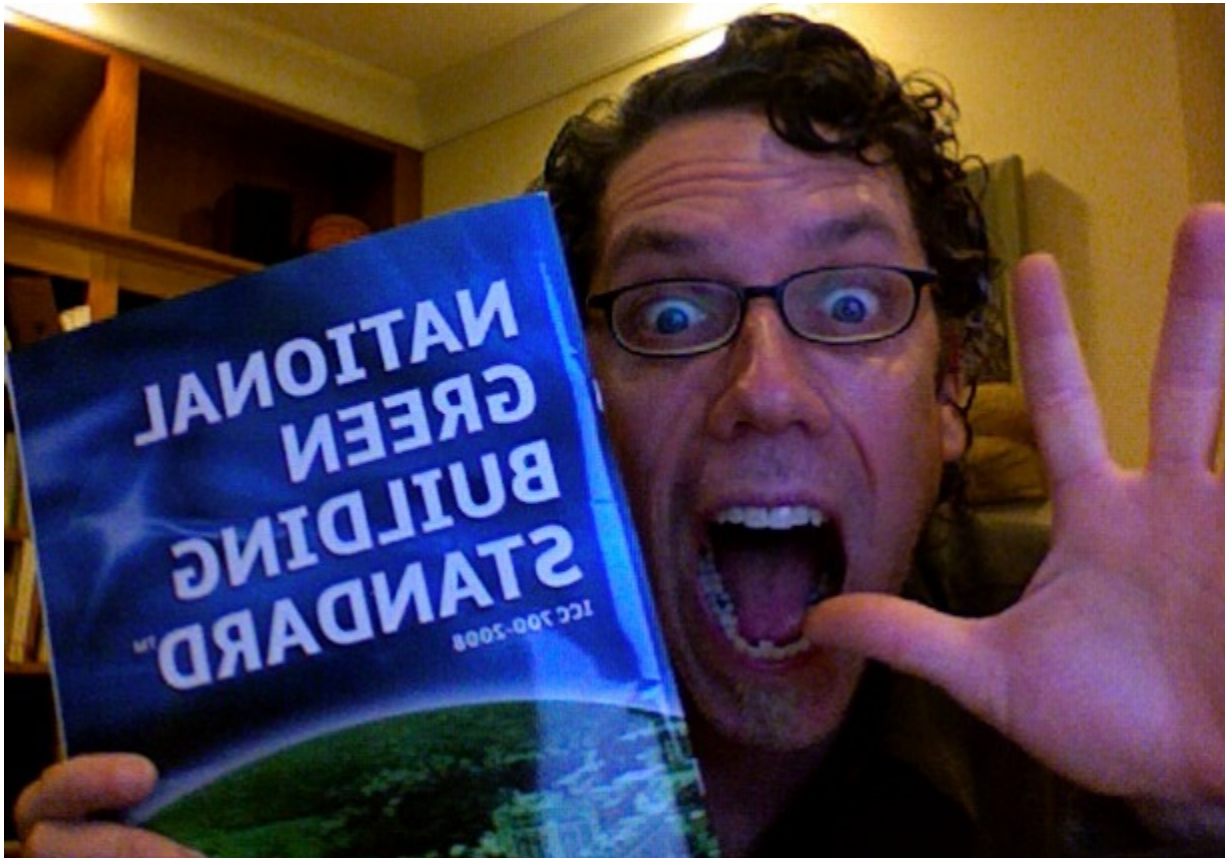


# NAHB-ICC National Green Building Standard hits mailboxes!



By Michael Chandler | March 1, 2009



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Image Credit: Photo Bill Beasley w/ permission

## It's big, it's green, but is it really a good thing?

The new NAHB-ICC National Green Building Standard (NGBS) guidebook hit mailboxes on Friday. I arrived home to this delightful picture in my in-box (see picture at right), along with an equally playful e-mail from my fellow shelter nerd, Bill Beasley.

Bill and I put in many hours reading and typing up comments on the new standard as it evolved. He came with me to the NAHB offices in

Washington, D.C., to sit in the peanut gallery as representatives of our local green building community, demanding a credible, comprehensive, and easily understandable standard for builders and designers who are just beginning to move beyond Energy Star to incorporate a full range of green building systems into their work; one that would give positive feedback as they improved their practices to true, high-performance, green building.

### **Stripping the standard of greenwash, one industry at a time**

When we finally walked out of that cavernous boardroom in the bowels of the NAHB “Death Star” building in D.C., we had stood up to the concrete industry in its attempt to eliminate credits for frost-protected shallow foundations. We also had stared down the steel industry in its aim to get recycled content and durability credits for virtually everything it produces. We had a credible standard coming together and were reduced to bickering about mandating that all fireplaces have gasketed doors and combustion air intakes, and any green-built house should be disqualified if it had a traditional stone fireplace with no gasketed door!

So Bill and I (and many others across the nation) were up late Friday night with highlighters in hand checking to see what had finally made it into the standard.

### **The bar is set low for a reason: inclusion**

The new NGBS has a lot more mandates than the old NAHB Green Building Program, but none of them are onerous. It does have a very low threshold to entry (222 points), so much so that the Bronze Level is just barely more challenging to reach than Energy Star. This was expected because one of the main goals of this program is to attract existing builders to green building by giving them a high likelihood of success at the bottom of the scale.

But it also sets Gold and Emerald levels (558 and 697 points respectively) high enough that builders can move upward to true high performance and even to net-zero without having to switch to the LEED-h standard to measure their advanced performance. Many architects and builders who work in LEED commercially will find it

natural to work with LEED-h on residential projects as well; But the NGBS is a real blessing for those of us who are residential-only, just getting started in green building and for municipalities looking to offer green building verification incentives to bring local building practices to a higher level.

If LEED-h is the brick church on the hill, the NGBS is the tent revival down by the river.

There will be charges of green washing, and a house that scores 223 points will be only marginally better than one that just meets Energy Star. But this program will get a lot of builders and designers to approach their projects from a whole-systems point of view rather than just putting down some bamboo flooring and a high-performance heating system and calling it green. It gives us an important new tool to raise the bar across the nation.

And yes, you can still give your client a certified green home with an open stone fireplace.