

Manitoba Company Moving Forward on Climate Action, but with Hills to Climb

Brandon-based [Greenstone Building Products](#) makes Insulated Composite Envelope (ICE) panels—built using a proprietary building material that is significantly lighter, stronger and more durable than traditional framing options. One major benefit of ICE panels is their ability to exceed energy efficiency standards and building code requirements. [Economic Development Brandon](#) has described ICE panels as being on the “leading edge of the new global mindset of passive energy ... providing the consumer with up to 75% faster build times and 20% more effective thermal value” than comparable insulation systems. Another significant benefit: “The payback is immediate in terms of lower monthly heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) bills - \$56 per month for a 1,350 square-foot conditioned living space, as compared to \$176 per month for conventional construction.”



Greenstone, which opened its 27,000 square-foot production plant in 2016, has a roster of residential and commercial construction clients in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nunavut, NWT, and Nova Scotia in Canada, and internationally in the United States and the Bahamas. Ironically, while enjoying success across Canada and internationally, Greenstone has encountered stumbling blocks in bringing its innovative and climate-friendly product to the Manitoba market, and most specifically, to the large and growing Winnipeg market.

One issue is that [Manitoba uses the 2010 version](#) of the National Building Code of Canada, which is 10 years behind in terms of reflecting available technology. The latest version of the [National Building Code of Canada](#) was released in 2019, but even that is based on 2015 product technology.

As well, the Standards Council of Canada provides construction industry manufacturers with two options when seeking to manufacture new products: 1) Obtain a certification from the Canadian Construction Materials Centre, or 2) get certified through an accredited third-party laboratory. The latter is the option that Greenstone pursued in order to certify the insulation, vapour barrier and structural components of its ICE panels. However, provincial governing bodies can choose whether to take ownership of this approval process or pass it over to municipal building authorities. In Manitoba, the government does the latter; and in Winnipeg, specifically, the city Planning Department requires a commercial building permit with an alternative solution document to use the ICE panels, even if it is for a residential construction job. This presents residential home builders with a cost and procedural barrier that Greenstone has not encountered elsewhere.

Technology has the potential to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy and at the same time create business opportunities along the way, but right now technology isn't being given a fair chance.

Cautionary approaches are undoubtedly important when it comes to building products, but the world moves quickly, and so too must policy. [British Columbia's carbon-neutral government](#) (a first in North America) is a good example. It perhaps is no coincidence that businesses such as Greenstone find the B.C. market to be particularly receptive to innovative, climate-friendly products.

With the provincial government promoting its [made-in-Manitoba Climate and Green Plan](#) to help meet federal commitments and attract businesses to Winnipeg and Manitoba, time is of the essence to create the right conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises to take climate action. More-flexible building codes and approvals processes could help unlock investment in clean technology in Manitoba and accelerate progress toward a low-carbon economy in Canada and around the world.

For information on examples of climate action by Manitoba business and to access tools and resources for taking climate action, visit the [Climate Action Toolkit for Manitoba Business](#).

About the Partners

The Manitoba Chambers of Commerce was established in 1931 and is the umbrella organization for Manitoba's chamber movement. With a membership comprised of local chambers of commerce as well as direct corporate members, the MCC is Manitoba's largest business lobby, representing more than 10,000 businesses and community leaders. Its mission is to champion sustainable economic growth leading to greater prosperity for business and communities in Manitoba.

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