



Zero Carbon Building Standards

Certification Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This document addresses both the Zero Carbon Building – Performance Standard (ZCB-Performance) and the Zero Carbon Building – Design Standard (ZCB-Design).

Pursuing ZCB is simple:

- For [ZCB-Performance](#), review the Standard and complete the workbook, providing one year of performance data. When you are ready, [register online](#) and submit your documentation for review. Earn your certification.
- For [ZCB-Design](#), review the Standard and [register online](#). When prepared, pay the certification fees and submit the workbook and other documentation for review. Earn your certification.

This document provides project teams additional detail on the Zero Carbon Building Standards certification process from start to finish.

REGISTRATION

Both ZCB-Performance and ZCB-Design projects begin by [registering online](#) through the CAGBC website. ZCB-Performance projects need only register when they are ready to submit the documentation for review. Given the duration of the design process, ZCB-Design projects typically register as soon as the decision to pursue certification is made. This allows them to declare the project's commitment to the requirements and to confirm the version of the standard that the project will meet.

It is important to ensure that the project title chosen is accurate in communicating the building's certification. For example, an organization's name alone should not be used nor words like "new". The project title will be used in the online project database.

Projects will acknowledge a [Certification Agreement](#) during the online registration. As participation in the ZCB Standards continues to grow, the certification agreement will set expectations for new users and allow CAGBC to clearly outline the responsibilities of each party. A copy of the Certification Agreement is available in the Technical Resources library for reference. If an individual other than the project owner completes the registration online, you must also complete the [Confirmation of Agent's Authority](#) form. Provide the form by email to zerocarbon@cagbc.org to complete the registration.

The CAGBC's [project database](#) will be updated to reflect the registration. Applicants can update the project's profile in the database at any time by logging in to [My Projects](#). The database is widely used by media and others. Project teams are strongly encouraged to highlight their success by providing photos, a complete narrative, a list of organizations involved in the project, and additional details.

FEES AND PAYMENTS

When completing the registration process, ZCB-Performance projects are prompted to pay the certification fee. ZCB-Design projects are prompted to pay a registration fee; the certification fee will only need to be paid when the documentation is ready to be submitted for review.

Website users completing the [registration form](#) for ZCB-Design and ZCB-Performance must always proceed to the shopping cart and complete the registration transaction. Project teams should ensure they are prepared to proceed to payment when registering to avoid errors or the need to complete the form multiple times.

Project fees are based on the project's certification pathway and size. Please refer to the [pricing guide](#) for more information.

CAGBC Specialist member organizations are eligible for discounts.

- **Registration fee:** discounts are determined automatically based on whether the person registering the project online is a part of CAGBC Specialist member organization. Only ZCB-Design projects are subject to a registration fee.
- **Certification fee:** To be eligible for discounts on ZCB-Design and ZCB-Performance certification fees, the building owner or property management organization must be a current CAGBC Specialist member.

ZCB-Performance projects use the online registration form to initiate certification fee payment. ZCB-Design projects use the project profile in [My Projects](#); open the project, scroll to the bottom of the page and click the “Pay Certification Fee” button to access the form. Both these forms on CAGBC’s website ask if the user is the owner. If you are not, there is a prompt and field to provide the CAGBC member number of the building owner to verify that the certification fees should reflect the member rate.

The CAGBC website allows clients to pay by credit card or elect to pay later by creating an invoice to be paid by cheque. Cheques should be made payable to the Canada Green Building Council, include the CAGBC project number or CAGBC invoice number, and be mailed to:

Canada Green Building Council
100 Murray Street, Suite 400
Ottawa ON K1N 0A1
Attn: Green Building Programs Administrator

Clients may also pay by electronic funds transfer (EFT), please contact zerocarbon@cagbc.org for additional information. A remittance form must be sent to finance@cagbc.org with the CAGBC invoice and/or project number to ensure the payment is processed.

REQUIREMENTS, RESOURCES, AND TOOLS

Proper documentation is critical to the successful certification of a project. Examples of documentation include descriptions, drawings, energy models, utility invoices, and meter readings. The documentation required is outlined in the Submittals tab of the ZCB-Performance and ZCB-Design workbooks. These Microsoft Excel tools are the most important pieces of documentation. The appropriate ZCB-Performance or ZCB-Design workbook must be fully completed and provided with the documentation submission.

Information on each Standard’s requirements, as well as additional technical guidance, is available on the [CAGBC website](#). This includes:

- **Zero Carbon Building Standards** (pdf), the primary direction for projects. They include information on project eligibility and scope.

- **Workbooks** (Excel) are the tools to support the required declarations and information collection for the certification. Teams fill out the appropriate workbook tab-by-tab to document their achievement.
- **Energy modelling guidelines** (pdf) are available to provide guidance for the energy modelling required to support certification.
- **Life-cycle cost calculator** (Excel) is a financial analysis tool that can be used to evaluate the financial viability of carbon reduction projects.
- **Embodied carbon reporting template** (Word) outlines the information that is required to be submitted in an embodied carbon report.
- CAGBC provides a number of [online courses and events](#), we encourage applicants to take a look at the courses available.

TECHNICAL INQUIRIES AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STANDARDS

CAGBC is happy to provide support for project teams. General questions about the certification process or standards can be directed to our customer service team at zerocarbon@cagbc.org.

In some cases, project teams may find that they require clarification or additional detail not outlined in the published resources to understand how the Standards apply in the specific context of their project. There may also be situations in which the project team feels that an alternative approach for demonstrating compliance should be considered, or that an exemption is warranted due to a specific set of circumstances. These situations can be addressed through a formal inquiry called an Interpretation Request. There is a charge of \$575 for each request submitted.

Interpretation requests are submitted using this [form](#). The form requires:

- The **Standard** (ZCB-Design or ZCB-Performance), the **Version** and **Requirement** being considered.
- **Subject:** the subject line should be succinct.
- **Summary question:** Project teams must propose a recommended approach, and the summary question should ask if the recommended approach may be used. The summary question should capture the approach being proposed. The question must be specific to a single requirement from the Standard and phrased as a single, yes or no question.
- **Context and arguments:** The context and arguments section should include a brief, but explicit description of the challenge encountered, including only details relevant to the inquiry. This section should capture the arguments for the proposed approach based on the requirement information found in the Standard. When suggesting alternative approaches, it is important to outline how the proposed approach aligns with the aim of the requirement to achieve a similar impact.

Consider when preparing an Interpretation Request:

- Do not include project details (title, address etc.); the submitted text will be posted on the CAGBC website.
- The context and arguments text is limited to 4000 characters including spaces.
- The form is text only. Attachments aren't needed for a clearly stated inquiry. If staff feel plans or drawings are necessary, we will reach out.

The interpretation request will be evaluated against the Standard and version indicated in the form. The process is designed to provide a sound, precedent setting response to the inquiry that is fair and consistent with the review of projects in the program. That said, rulings do not guarantee the requirement will be achieved; the project documentation submitted during certification review must demonstrate that the requirement has been achieved (including adhering to the ruling of the Interpretation).

Rulings are communicated to applicants by e-mail and are publicly posted in the [online database](#). Rulings are decided by CAGBC staff with approval of one or more of CAGBC's groups of Canadian expert volunteers including the Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs), Accelerator groups, and/or the Zero Carbon Steering Committee (ZCSC). CAGBC strives to provide rulings within 90 days.

Interpretations (including rulings) are posted in the online database to provide guidance for projects yet to submit for certification. These rulings are supplemental guidance, not new requirements, and therefore apply to all registered projects. Any project leveraging a ruling in their certification submission must clearly indicate the Interpretation number noted in the database in their documentation.

CAGBC may determine that an interpretation applies exclusively to the unique challenge of one project. In this case, the interpretation will not be made publicly available.

SUBMISSIONS

Please provide all documentation in electronic format, noting the following:

- Files should be organized into a folder structure that reflects the requirements.
- Avoid unnecessary subfolders (i.e., folders with one file in them).
- For ease of file transfer, avoid long folder and file names.
- Avoid the use of French accents on folder or file names.
- Provide the Workbook and calculators in Excel.
- Provide all other documents in PDF format where possible to ensure readability.
- Drawings should be provided in greyscale.
- Photos may be provided in jpeg format.
- Avoid using zipped folders within your submission folder.

The certification review process is initiated once the following is submitted to the CAGBC:

- 1) Certification payment.
- 2) Project documentation in electronic format, provided via an FTP site, shared site, or file transfer service of your choice. Please send an email to zerocarbon@cagbc.org with instructions on how CAGBC can access the documents. If necessary, the project can submit documentation using a CD or USB by mailing the storage device to the CAGBC's Ottawa office. The CAGBC does not accept hard copy documentation.

REVIEW PROCESS

CAGBC aims to complete the first review of a project within 25 business days after payment and documentation are received. Timelines may be extended if needed as a result of complexities or novelty within the submission. The majority of projects only require a single review to achieve certification. A final review (also 25 business days) may be required if outstanding comments or documentation need to be addressed prior to completing certification.

When payment and documentation are received, CAGBC staff promptly ensure that the submission appears to be complete (for example, that the workbook has been provided) to ensure there are no omissions that will prevent the review of the project. Next, the submission material is reviewed in detail to ensure compliance with requirements and a quality assurance review is completed to ensure consistency across the program before releasing the first review report to the applicant. In this review, requirements are marked Awarded, Pending, or Denied. Requirements may be marked pending if additional clarifications, calculations, or documentation is required. Rationales are provided where a requirement is noted as denied or pending.

Applicants must respond to any outstanding requests for clarification from the first review. This documentation must be provided in electronic format by file transfer, or by email if attachments are few. Instructions for downloading the documents, or the attachments, should be sent by email to either the CAGBC staff member who issued the report or zerocarbon@cagbc.org. Applicants are encouraged to provide a response to review comments in 25 business days. Once CAGBC completes its review, the final review report is provided.

If necessary, applicants may appeal CAGBC's final review by providing an additional submission to demonstrate how requirements are met. Applicants must confirm their intent to appeal within 25 business days of receiving the final review report. The appeal documentation package must be provided to the CAGBC promptly. Appeals are charged at a rate of \$850 (plus applicable taxes).

Applicants wishing to appeal should prepare an electronic letter or email that outlines their concern. These concerns should be emailed to zerocarbon@cagbc.org, along with all relevant documents and payment details (name, company, mailing address and email). CAGBC will provide an invoice for the applicable fees. The appeal is considered officially submitted once payment and documentation have both been received. The additional documentation will be reviewed. If necessary, the relevant Technical Advisory Group will be consulted in the decision of the appeal and in the case of a denial of a certification, the Zero Carbon Steering Committee. Applicants will be issued an updated certification review report.

Prior to the first or final submittal, a project may decide to no longer pursue certification. To withdraw a project from the certification process, the CAGBC will require confirmation from the project owner. Certification fees are not refundable. Once a project is marked as withdrawn, it will no longer be publicly listed in the CAGBC's [project database](#).

CERTIFICATION AND PROMOTION

The certification date is the date the final report is issued. Certified projects can request an electronic certificate marking their achievement. An electronic certification mark is available for ZCB-Performance projects that indicates the year of certification. Review the [brand guidelines](#) to see how to properly refer to registered and certified projects. Information on marketing support is available on the [website](#).

The CAGBC's [project database](#) will be updated to reflect the certification. Applicants can update the project's profile in the database at any time by logging in to [My Projects](#). The database is widely used by media and others. Project teams are strongly encouraged to highlight their success by providing photos, a complete narrative, a list of organizations involved in the project, and additional details.

RECERTIFICATION

ZCB-Performance verifies the carbon balance of a building over a period of one year, and annual recertification is required. The one-year period evaluated for certification is called the performance year. There should not be any gaps between performance years; the performance year for a recertification begins the day after the end of the prior performance year.

Buildings must resubmit within six months of the recertification performance year ending to maintain their certification status.

When registering for recertification, projects must use the project name used in the prior certification. Each recertification is considered a separate project, with a unique project number and profile in the public [project database](#) and in [My Projects](#).

Projects are required to submit documentation for the recertification performance year and payment of the certification fees in the same manner as the initial certification.

ELIGIBILITY AND CHOICE OF VERSIONS

From time to time, a new version of the standard will open. ZCB-Design registered projects may elect to pursue a newer version of the standard. Email CAGBC at zerocarbon@cagbc.org to upgrade to a newer version at no cost.

ZCB-Performance projects must use the latest version of the standard in place at the start of the performance year. They may choose to adopt a newer version if one is introduced after the start of the performance year.

Projects that achieve ZCB-Design certification are eligible for ZCB-Performance certification after one year of operation. Projects that have not achieved ZCB-Design must be operational for at least three years to be eligible for ZCB-Performance certification.

From time to time, addenda to the standards may be released. Addenda will typically provide corrections, clarifications, or additional flexibility. Project teams must follow the standard, including addenda, in place on the date the project was registered. It is recommended that later addenda be followed as well.

Consult the standards for further details on eligibility.

SUNSET AND SUBMISSION DEADLINES

ZCB-Design projects must submit for certification review within two years of the date registration closed for the version that the project registered. For example, ZCB-Design v3 launched June 20, 2022. Registration for ZCB-Design v2 closed September 30, 2022. ZCB-Design v2 projects must therefore submit for certification by September 30, 2024.

If a ZCB-Design project is unable to submit for review before the deadline, the project team may choose to upgrade to a newer version of the standard or withdraw the project.

ZCB-Performance projects must submit for recertification within six months of the recertification performance year ending to maintain their certification status.