

Carbon reduction in construction - the time to act is now

South Africa's construction industry has a pivotal role to play in helping the country meet its 2050 goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero, says Databuild CEO Morag Evans - but this requires immediate and decisive action around the implementation of sustainable building practices.



Source: www.unsplash.com

Globally, the construction and building industries account for around 39% of carbon emissions, according to the World Green Building Council - while a United National Environment Programme report reveals that construction industry emissions reached their highest levels in 2019. Under the international Paris Agreement on climate change, to which South Africa is a signatory, the building sector must also operate at net-zero carbon by 2050.

“Add to this the fact that South Africa is the world’s 12th largest greenhouse gas emitter, and it becomes clear that carbon reduction is no longer a choice, but an absolute necessity,” said Evans.



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5 Nov 2021



“While the government has made several positive steps towards achieving its net-zero target, such as the Carbon Tax Act of 2019, the mandatory display of energy performance certificates by building owners, and the increase to 100 megawatt (MW) in the power generation licence threshold, the construction industry needs to do its part to lower its carbon footprint,” she adds.

Rather than wait for government to legislate the reduction of embodied carbon, Evans said construction companies need to lead by example and proactively work to minimise harmful practices that negatively impact the carbon footprint of buildings.

“This includes making smart choices around building design, the manufacture and supply of products and materials, and construction activities and processes on-site. When it comes to building design, professionals should incorporate features that enhance energy efficiency, and specify sustainable materials that lower carbon levels over the long term. Where possible, construction materials made from recycled content should be used.”



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Dialogue 4 Nov 2021



“Contractors need to optimise supply chains to reduce the amount of transportation needed to get materials to the construction site,” Evans continues. “This could include sourcing materials locally to further reduce transportation emissions.

“Construction companies can further minimise their environmental impact by assessing their water needs across a project’s lifecycle and reducing water waste and surface runoff, which contains harmful pollutants that can contaminate local water supplies and damage the environment. Additionally, waste generated from construction activities, as well as any stock leftover at the end of a project should be recycled.”

“The pandemic has made us more environmentally conscious than ever before,” Evans concludes. “By committing to green design and construction best practices, businesses stand to gain not only from a reputational perspective but also financially.”

“The road to net-zero will not be an easy one but, as South Africans have shown time and time again, by working together we can preserve our planet’s future wellbeing.”

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