

The Safer Materials Shift

The International Living Future Institute's starting points and pathways for integrating Red List Free and Approved Materials in Affordable Housing for improved health of buildings, people, and communities

Chemicals linked to cancer, asthma, reproductive toxicity, and other destructive health and environmental impacts find their way into our buildings every day through building materials with unsafe ingredients. However, MANY of these products are now completely avoidable. The collective work of many in the affordable housing, AEC, and manufacturing sectors over the past several years has built a list of product categories that can be prioritized because there is virtually no effort to find available, cost-neutral products that are safe and healthy ([Red List](#) Free). There is no need for each team to individually figure out which specific products are healthy (or to define what healthy even means!) and which product types can easily be shifted to healthier materials - this work has largely been done and is highly replicable.

ILFI created and maintains the Red List, the industry's most comprehensive list of harmful chemicals found in building materials that is included in certifications like LEED, WELL, and Enterprise Green Communities. We have also helped 60+ affordable housing projects registered for the Living Building Challenge (and other ILFI certifications) to integrate Red List Free and Approved materials into their buildings. We now want to see this knowledge spread much further beyond these projects and ensure that the whole affordable housing sector is able to simultaneously decarbonize while also creating the healthiest spaces possible. We are inviting Housing Partnership Network and Stewards of Affordable Housing members to join a cohort of affordable housing developers leading the movement towards transparency and healthy materials by integrating safe and healthy building products in prioritized product categories. Join the shift to healthier materials and healthier spaces!

BENEFITS IN JOINING THE SAFER MATERIALS COHORT

- **Healthier materials** in buildings resulting in improved air quality and health of residents and all those affected by unsafe product chemistry during the life cycle from production to demolition
- **Opportunity to learn** how to easily integrate Red List Free and Approved products into projects, which allows project teams to earn additional points under many certifications including the Living Building Challenge, LEED, WELL, and Enterprise Green Communities.
- **A stipend** of approximately \$2,000 per organization to recognize the contribution of each participating member.
- **Access to training, resources, and education** from ILFI around material health, the Red List, materials vetting, and advocacy, which typically would only be available through ILFI's Online Education or the Annual Conferences and other events.
- **Access to technical support** from ILFI to explore specific questions related to safer materials vetting, tracking, and documentation.
- **Access to a peer learning and support network** of industry leaders and experts in the healthy materials movement that includes 60+ registered affordable housing project teams seeking Living Building Challenge and other ILFI certifications.

- **Opportunity to promote projects** through participation in ILFI webinars, conferences, blogs, articles, case studies, and/or social media.
- **Opportunity to show sector leadership** in healthy materials for affordable housing and help influence the direction of the Living Building Challenge Materials Certifications pathways and Affordable Housing work.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Participate in educational sessions and quarterly check-ins:** A representative from each development team is requested to attend 2-3 free training sessions between July-December 2024 and participate in quarterly check-ins via email or Zoom until December 2025 to track progress.
- **Track building products** vetted and specified throughout the duration of the program, and **share information** with ILFI to support the development of a report to be published in June 2026 to help distribute this information further in the Affordable Housing sector.
- **Provide feedback:** Report best practices and lessons learned through 1-2 surveys throughout the program and/or 1 feedback interview with ILFI to occur in January through March 2026. This will communicate project successes, where additional support is needed, and how the Materials Petal of the Living Building Challenge can further address the needs of the Affordable Housing sector.
- **Time commitment:** Time to vet and track materials will vary depending on experience, but teams can expect 40-80 hours of time over a year and a half (which can be a great learning experience for early career staff members). We will also request attendance at 3 educational sessions, provide quarterly check-ins on progress, and provide feedback to ILFI (see details below).

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- **Affordable Housing Developer with a materials scope** for either new construction, renovation, or maintenance projects where materials can be researched and/or selected between June 2024 and December 2025 OR developers who have a Basis of Design or common specification that they would like to update.
- **Ability to commit** to the time specified above (Note that some of the work can be performed by early career staff members.)
- **A desire** for safer materials and a healthier built environment.

Reach out to Susan Puri (susan.puri@living-future.org) for more information on joining the cohort or attend our info session on May 31st at 1 pm ET! [Register for the Info Session](#).