



Designation: E2921 – 13

# Standard Practice for Minimum Criteria for Comparing Whole Building Life Cycle Assessments for Use with Building Codes and Rating Systems<sup>1</sup>

This standard is issued under the fixed designation E2921; the number immediately following the designation indicates the year of original adoption or, in the case of revision, the year of last revision. A number in parentheses indicates the year of last reapproval. A superscript epsilon ( $\epsilon$ ) indicates an editorial change since the last revision or reapproval.

## 1. Scope

1.1 This practice provides criteria to be applied irrespective of the assessment (LCA) tool that is used when LCA is undertaken at the whole building level to compare a final whole building design to a reference building design.

1.2 The purpose of this practice is to support the use of whole building Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) in building codes and building rating systems by ensuring that comparative assessments of final whole building designs relative to reference building designs take account of the relevant building features, life cycle stages, and related activities in similar fashion for both the reference and final building designs of the same building.

1.3 The criteria do not deal with building occupant behavior, possible future changes in building function, building rehabilitation or retrofit, or other matters that cannot be foreseen or reasonably estimated at the design or permitting stage, or both where this practice applies.

1.4 Only environmental impacts and aspects of sustainability are addressed in this practice. The social and economic impacts and aspects of sustainability are not addressed in this practice.

1.5 This practice does not deal with basic LCA methodology, calculation methods or related matters that are covered in cited international standards.

1.6 This practice does not supersede or modify existing ISO standards for the application of LCA at the product level, nor does it address the aggregation of building product Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs) at the whole building level.

1.7 This practice does not specify the impact categories or sustainability aspects to be addressed in building codes or building rating systems and users of this practice conform to

the impact category requirements specified in the applicable code or rating system.

1.8 The text of this standard contains notes that provide explanatory material. These notes shall not be considered as requirements of the standard.

1.9 *This standard does not purport to address all of the safety concerns, if any, associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

## 2. Referenced Documents

2.1 *ASTM Standards:*<sup>2</sup>

[E631 Terminology of Building Constructions](#)

[E2114 Terminology for Sustainability Relative to the Performance of Buildings](#)

2.2 *Other Standards:*<sup>3</sup>

[ISO 14040:2006 Environmental Management – Life Cycle Assessment – Principles and Framework](#)

[ISO 14044:2006 Environmental Management – Life Cycle Assessment – Requirements and Guidelines](#)

[ISO 14050 Terminology](#)

## 3. Terminology

3.1 For terms related to building construction, refer to Terminology [E631](#).

3.2 For terms related to sustainability relative to the performance of buildings, refer to Terminology [E2114](#).

3.3 For terms related to LCA (for example, product system, input, output) refer to ISO 14050 Terminology.

3.4 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.4.1 *building, n*—a shelter comprising a partially or totally enclosed space(s), erected by means of planned forces of forming and combining materials. **E631**

<sup>1</sup> This test method is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee E60 on Sustainability and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee E60.01 on Buildings and Construction.

Current edition approved Dec. 1, 2013. Published December 2013. DOI: 10.1520/E2921-13

<sup>2</sup> For referenced ASTM standards, visit the ASTM website, [www.astm.org](http://www.astm.org), or contact ASTM Customer Service at [service@astm.org](mailto:service@astm.org). For *Annual Book of ASTM Standards* volume information, refer to the standard's Document Summary page on the ASTM website.

<sup>3</sup> Available from International Organization for Standardization (ISO), 1, ch. de la Voie-Creuse, CP 56, CH-1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland, <http://www.iso.org>.

3.4.2 *building*, *v*—the act or process of construction. **E631**

3.4.3 *building product*—goods used during the life cycle of a building as part of its infrastructure.

3.4.4 *building service life*—the period of time after installation during which a building (or its parts) meet or exceed the performance requirement(s).

3.4.5 *characterization factor*—factor derived from a characterization model that is applied to convert an assigned life cycle inventory analysis result to the common unit of the category indicator.

3.4.5.1 *Discussion*—The common unit allows calculation of the category indicator result (ISO 14044).

3.4.6 *impact category*—a class representing environmental issue of concern to which life cycle inventory analysis results may be assigned.

3.4.7 *life cycle assesment (LCA)*—compilation and evaluation of the inputs, outputs and the potential environmental impacts of a product system throughout its life cycle.

3.4.8 *life cycle inventory analysis (LCI)*—phase of life cycle assessment involving the compilation and quantification of inputs and outputs for a product throughout its life cycle.

3.4.9 *operating energy*—energy loads that are related to building space conditioning, lighting, service water heating or ventilation for human comfort.

3.4.10 *plug loads*—all energy use by devices, appliances and equipment connected to convenience receptacle outlets during the building service life.

3.4.11 *process energy*—energy loads that are not directly related to building space conditioning, lighting, service water heating or ventilation for human comfort, sometimes referred to as ‘process loads.’

3.4.12 *reference building design*—a building design created to be used as a benchmark, or baseline, against which a final design is compared to demonstrate improvement in performance for impact categories.

3.4.13 *reference service life*—service life of a building product that is known or expected under a particular set, that is, a reference set of in-use conditions and that shall form the basis of estimating the service life under other in-use conditions.

3.4.14 *relocatable modular building*—a partially or completely assembled building that complies with applicable codes, or state regulations, at the time of construction and is constructed in a manufacturing facility using a modular construction process. Relocatable modular buildings are designed to be reused or repurposed multiple times and transported to different building sites.

3.4.15 *whole building life cycle assesment (whole building LCA)*—life cycle assessment of the complete building enclosure, structural systems, interior walls, and interior finishes and trim of a building, which may include operating energy, but excludes furniture and attached cabinetry.

## 4. ISO Compliance

4.1 The procedures used for building product LCA shall be compliant with ISO 14040 and ISO 14044.

## 5. Significance and Use

5.1 This practice provides criteria that building design teams shall use to compare the environmental impacts associated with a reference building design and a final building design, including additions to existing buildings where applicable.

5.2 This practice deals specifically with material selection for initial construction, including associated maintenance and replacement cycles over an assumed service life, taking operating energy use into account if required or explicitly allowed under the applicable code or rating system.

## 6. Criteria

### 6.1 *Building and Product Service Lives:*

6.1.1 Unless otherwise specified by the applicable code or rating system, the building service life shall be no less than 75 years.

6.1.2 The same building service life shall be assumed for the reference building design and for the final design.

6.1.3 Product replacement schedules shall reflect the reference service lives for individual products or materials and the consequent number of replacements required over the assumed building service life.

6.1.4 When the reference service life of a product is less than the assumed building service life, the aggregate impacts associated with the number of product replacements necessary to equal the service life of the building shall be included. When the reference service life of the product is greater than the assumed building service life, the impacts associated with the product shall not be discounted to reflect the remaining product service life.

NOTE 1—If the expected life of a component is 20 years and the assumed building service life is 75 years, then the impacts would be multiplied by 3.75 to normalize the changeovers to be equivalent to the required 75-year life service. However, if the expected life of a component is greater than 75 years, then the impacts would not be scaled.

### 6.2 *Life Cycle Stages:*

6.2.1 All life cycle stages associated with the building shall be taken into account for the reference and final designs, including resource extraction or harvesting, building product manufacturing, all related transportation, on-site construction, operations including maintenance and replacement, and deconstruction or demolition and disposal.

6.2.2 The operations stage shall include operating energy use if required or explicitly allowed by the applicable code or rating system, in which case the results of energy simulations for the reference and final building designs shall be included in the LCAs and combined with embodied effects for the purpose of calculating impact measures.

6.2.3 Plug loads are permitted to be included in operating energy estimates, and process energy excluded unless there is a clear and documented relationship to operating energy. The final building design shall include comparable plug loads and process loads if such loads are included in the operating energy estimates for the reference building design to which the final design is being compared.

6.2.4 If operating energy use is included, the reference and final building designs shall be in the same location, with