

Case Study

Supporting a Healthier Indoor Environment with Policy and Performance



LBA Realty



Safety. Science. Transformation.™



The health and safety of indoor environments have been a focus for building owners, managers, investors and occupants for many years. However, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of healthier indoor environments and, as a result, many organizations began to dramatically increase and accelerate their investments in this area. What was once considered a nice-to-have feature offering market differentiation suddenly became a must-have, and global organizations began looking for new ways to increase their focus on sustainability and occupant health and wellness.

LBA Realty, a full-service real estate investment and management company, recognizes the importance of developing and managing its facilities with the indoor environment in mind. The firm's diverse portfolio caters to global companies and encompasses over 94 million square feet in major national markets, including 9 million square feet of office real estate throughout the western United States. Most importantly, LBA prides itself on remaining innovative and ahead of the curve when meeting occupants' needs. In early 2021, LBA worked with UL Solutions to achieve the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air for its commercial office portfolio. The firm also partnered with UL Solutions in years prior to earn both LEED and Fitwel certifications for specific buildings.

However, as the pandemic set in and offices nationwide sat empty, the team at LBA began searching for ways to increase the firm's focus on the health and wellness of its indoor environments. In addition to indoor air quality, LBA wanted to find a more expansive way to demonstrate the firm's long-standing commitment to occupant health and wellness.

This search revealed several options, but it quickly became apparent that not all options were created equal. If LBA was going to pursue additional credentials for its facilities, it wanted to be as thorough as possible, and the most effective way to do that was by moving from the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air to the more comprehensive UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment.

"We needed to find things that were legitimate, science-based and had some experience behind them. We didn't want to be guinea pigs for technology that was not proven in a commercial environment."

- Melanie Colbert, principal, Operations at LBA Realty

Comprehensive verification built on science

While LBA faced the pandemic by looking for new ways to increase occupant confidence in its building interiors, experts at UL Solutions had already turned their attention to developing a marketing claim verification program that would help customers demonstrate their commitment to occupant health and well-being. At UL Solutions, we recognize that customers' internal company policies play an important role in maintaining a healthier indoor environment, but we also know these policies are only part of the effort. With this in mind, the UL Verified Healthy Building program relies on the physical inspection of buildings. This allows our experts to determine if the building owner/operator is following their policies to support occupant well-being as expected in practice and provides building owners and managers with greater confidence in their efforts.

The UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment represents the most comprehensive offering in the program by covering the verification of indoor air quality (IAQ), water quality, building hygiene, lighting and acoustics. It relies on the same scientific, performance-based approach as the other offerings in the program — the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air and the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air and Water — but is designed for building owners who want to expand their efforts. So, when LBA set out to identify the best option for communicating the firm's health and wellness initiatives and long-term goals for its portfolio, pursuing the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment was the clear choice.

"The UL Verified Healthy Building program is 100% performance-based. We are looking at the performance of the building as it relates to the indoor environment and as it relates to the people in the building. It's not policy-based, it's not amenity-based, it's hyper-focused on the performance of the building."

- Sean McCrady, global director, Assets & Sustainability, Real Estate & Properties at UL Solutions

"We've been partnering with UL Solutions on a number of environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives throughout the years, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, we needed to challenge ourselves to expand our focus on ESG ... and the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment seemed to be the next natural evolution."

— Melanie Colbert, principal, Operations at LBA Realty





Leveraging science to strengthen confidence

When LBA began evaluating options for assessing the indoor environment beyond the firm's existing UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air, the firm had two main criteria in mind:

1. Remain best in class in the eyes of investors, tenants, employees and the communities it serves.
2. Engage with a respected — and well-recognized — partner that offers a science-based approach that extends beyond a policy review.

The UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment met these criteria by providing a comprehensive look at the built environment through an evaluation of water quality, building hygiene, lighting and acoustics in addition to IAQ. Further, like all offerings in the UL Verified Healthy Building program, verification for Indoor Environment relies upon on-site visual inspections and performance testing in addition to a policy review.

Most immediately, the verification of indoor air, water and building hygiene would help LBA's tenants feel more comfortable returning to the office, but the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment would address more than those immediate needs. LBA believes health and wellness factors will quickly become prerequisites for all indoor spaces, and the two additional areas covered by the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment — lighting and acoustics — would help the firm demonstrate its ongoing, broader commitment to occupant health and wellness.

In addition to this comprehensive approach, LBA turned to UL Solutions due to our widespread brand recognition and the science-based approach that is the foundation of the entire UL Verified Healthy Building program. Verification would build confidence with tenants and allow LBA to back up its efforts with science and present proof of the firm's work to key stakeholders.

Finally, LBA also wanted to ensure it was doing everything it could to maintain its buildings despite abnormally low occupancy. Dramatically reduced water usage, new HVAC settings and schedules, and other changes at the building level meant LBA needed to understand if it was appropriately addressing the needs of both returning tenants and near-empty buildings. "The portfolio was down to single-digit occupancy during COVID-19," said Colbert. "We needed to make sure that our water systems were being flushed and run regularly, that our AC systems were being treated properly, so this really was a quality check for us to ensure that we're doing everything that we should be doing at an operational level."

"As we continue to try to get tenants back in the office building, we needed to provide some verification that what we were doing as operators and owners was providing a safer, healthier environment for their employees. Having a program with UL Solutions was important to us because it provides both the science-based results and the recognition of a company with UL Solutions' reputation."

- Melanie Colbert, principal, Operations at LBA Realty





Furthering LBA's long-standing commitment

As the first customer in the world to earn the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment, LBA was not looking to replace or overshadow any existing achievements. Rather, the firm wanted to further its efforts and complement the other credentials it had already earned: UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Air, LEED for Operations and Maintenance, and Fitwel.

The UL Verified Healthy Building program was developed to offer an objective, science-based verification unique in the market. The program was also designed to support additional building assessments by minimizing the need for additional testing. "Our program aligns well with other building programs," said McCrady. "It was very specifically designed, so there's a crosswalk between our program and multiple other programs related to health and wellness."

When conducting assessments for the UL Verified Healthy Building program, the experts from UL Solutions focus on the performance of the indoor environment as it relates to the people in the building, and much of this assessment connects directly to how the building is being managed. Both LEED and Fitwel have different approaches and focuses, but the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark indoor air quality testing and assessment uses data required for LEED operations and maintenance credits for v4.1 indoor air quality submittal and meets compliance standards for Fitwel indoor air quality testing and assessment requirements. As a result, LBA was able to leverage the data from the UL Verified Healthy Building program and work with UL Solutions to earn both LEED and Fitwell certifications across its commercial portfolio while saving time and money on testing.

Most important, working with UL Solutions allowed LBA to strengthen its commitment to its tenants and demonstrate this commitment with greater confidence. As LBA continues to sharpen its focus on the indoor environment, UL Solutions remains similarly committed to understanding the needs of the market and offering science-based options designed to help support a healthier future.

"We always want to operate at the highest levels from an owner and manager standpoint, and what all of these programs [Fitwel, LEED and the UL Verified Healthy Building Mark for Indoor Environment] do is provide the third-party validation and framework we need to demonstrate that."

*- Melanie Colbert, principal,
Operations at LBA Realty*



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