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Why Are There Two 'Passive Houses?'

PHI and PHIUS

You may have stumbled upon a tricky divide in the US Passive House community with two versions of 'passive house' being promoted by separate entities: the Passive House Institute (PHI), and the Passive House Institute US (PHIUS). PHIUS was originally an affiliate and approved trainer and certifier for PHI. In 2011, PHI cancelled its contract with PHIUS for misconduct. (The PHI letter is [here](#).) PHIUS disputed the claims by PHI and continued working to launch an independent building performance program. If PHIUS had chosen a new name and rebranded it would have been less confusing. However, PHIUS chose to retain its name and continued using much of the same processes and protocols resulting in a confused community and marketplace ever since.

Navigating the Confusion

Many existing and established, independent Passive House advocacy organizations have managed to navigate this challenge carefully, but not eliminate the unfortunate confusion. Most early adopters in the US were trained by and had certified projects through PHIUS when the two entities were still aligned. Even after the decertification of PHIUS, from 2011 and 2015, the two standards were essentially the same and used the same target performance metrics, software and protocols. This allowed these regional PH advocacy entities to turn a blind eye and acknowledge both certifications as 'passive house' buildings.

Competing Standards

In 2015 the differences became substantially more significant when PHIUS launched its own 'PHIUS+' standard. At the same time as the international Passive House Institute launched their supplemental Plus and Premium Passive House standards. PHIUS also moved to using a new energy modeling software developed by another German Institute. PHIUS modified its PHIUS+ 2015 performance targets and made a number of other significant diversions from PHI's older protocols. Meanwhile, PHI made many adjustments to its own certification and software. PHI completely overhauled its method for calculating primary energy, added credits for both onsite and offsite renewable energy, included a phased protocol for retrofits and adjusted their source energy calculations to reflect both local climate demands and the specific regional grid source energy supply. The result is that the two standards are now distinct and can generate significantly different buildings, despite the common origins and confusingly similar names.

The Birth of the NAPHN

During the period of uncertainty when PHIUS was decertified and the US Passive House community was in flux, unclear how things might develop, a number of existing regional groups sought continuity in support of the practitioners and advocates working with the Passive House Standard. They chose to remain aligned with the international Passive House Institute and maintain ties with the global Passive House community. Regional groups also tried to maintain ties with PHIUS but were unable to negotiate suitable agreements.

Most groups recognized the need for some form of independent 'umbrella' organization to share Passive House knowledge in a peer-to-peer manner. It was during this time that the American

Passive House Network (APHN) was formed, which subsequently added 'North' and became the NAPHN. This umbrella organization was originally intended to support the Passive House Standard as was being utilized by both PHI and PHIUS at the time and thus was effectively a 'neutral' body with regards to PHI and PHIUS. But as PHIUS moved away from the Passive House Standard NAPHN continued to support the international standard and maintain access and support to the many practitioners and regional groups working with it. The NAPHN is now focused on promoting the international Passive House standards across the North American marketplace as a critical tool in helping achieve our post-carbon future. The NAPHN enjoys a supportive and collaborative relationship with the Passive House Institute and the global Passive House community.

Moving Forward

Given the distinct nature of the two pathways and certification bodies, they should be treated separately. We respect PHIUS's stated preference to refer to their projects as 'passive buildings' and as PHIUS+ certified projects. We recommend referring to all PHI-related projects, trainings and buildings as either "Passive House Buildings,' PassivHaus Certified, PHI-certified or aligned with the international Passive House Standard.

There are many programs to help achieve our post-carbon future including Energy Star, LEED, Living Building Challenge, Passive House Standard and PHIUS+, to name just a few. The NAPHN sees the benefit of working cooperatively to accelerate market transformation of the built environment in order to manifest the sustainable planet we all require.
