Climate-Responsive, Evidence-Based Green-Roof Design Decision Support for U.S. Climates

By Joon-Ho Choi, PhD, LEED AP

ABSTRACT

A number of trends have recently emerged in the areas of environmental building design and high-performance systems. However, in spite of many design and technical efforts to improve the performance using multiple building enclosure components—especially green roofs—the critical uncertainty of existing mechanisms, such as predefined computational modeling and design guidelines, has frequently resulted in lower building performance efficiency than intended. In reality, examination of many actual green roof performance cases revealed an even larger energy usage and/or lower environmental performance of the building, where implemented, than those of the adopted base cases.

To address this challenge, we developed a Climate-Responsive, Evidence-Based Green-Roof Design Decision Support Tool that uses finely tuned performance modeling with calibration by actual measured data from existing best practices. By utilizing these composite best-practice cases as a source for reference data, this project can provide stakeholders (e.g., architects, engineers, facility managers, owners, etc.) with readily applicable and reliable green roof design solutions for new/renovation projects. A design solution algorithm that was developed by this project adopted multiple computational data-mining methods and performance simulation modeling. This project approach can lead to effective green roof design decisions in an early stage of an individualized project with various climate and geometric conditions, based on integrated principles of design and building architectural configurations.

A grant by the RCI Foundation to the author's research group at the University of Southern California supported development of this tool.

INTRODUCTION

There is widespread recognition and a growing literature of measured data that suggest that green roofs can reduce building energy consumption as well as provide environmental benefits.[1–3] Vegetative or green roofs can act as urban heat-island effect mitigation tools, where water evaporation from the vegetation, as well as the thermal mass and thermal resistance of the green roof, contribute to reduced indoor and outdoor temperatures in buildings and urban areas.[4–6] This, in turn, helps reduce the cooling load for a building, resulting in reduced cooling air requirements. Therefore, energy consumption is reduced, as well as the associated output of atmospheric carbon[5,7] and the downsizing of the HVAC system for the building.

However, the question arises as to whether the roof assembly is performing according to its design, and whether any alteration made to the assembly could make a difference in the building's thermal performance. In addition, the complexity of design configurations in design parameters (which should be considered in environmentally responsive design principles) demands considerable project effort and financial expenditure. As a result, most stakeholders routinely follow what they have done in previous projects and/or adopt a "rule-of-thumb" experience that includes skipping the step that requires an in-depth climate-responsive design optimization process. Such an imperfect design process would probably result in much higher energy use and increased greenhouse-gas emission, while sacrificing effective environmental benefits in urban heat-island effects.[2,8]

Therefore, the goal of this project is to provide a design decision support tool for green roofs that would be useful in

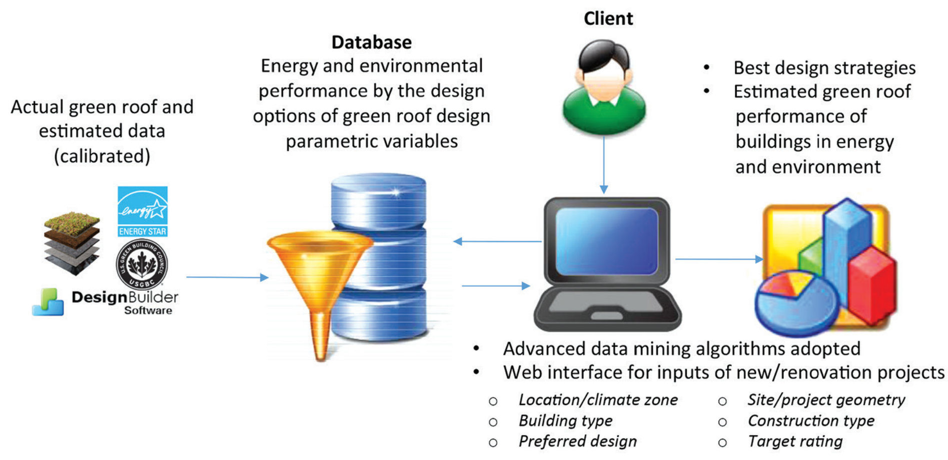

Figure 1 – Conceptual diagram of the design tool process of this project.

providing an environmentally responsive parametric design with consideration of the climate and seasonal characteristics of a project site (*Figure 1*). Thus, the developed tool will assist stakeholders in establishing optimized design solutions without sacrificing conventional design and construction processes.

OBJECTIVES

1. Effectively model green roof assemblies for a building in an energy-modeling program, and calibrate those models based upon the use of existing data collected from a selected reference site.
2. Identify the role of the different parameters of a green roof assembly, and quantify their impact on a building's heating and cooling loads.
3. Determine if a green roof (as a roofing option for different climate types) is a better alternative for cooling a roof, in terms of the thermal performance of the building.
4. Estimate environmental performance based on evaluated energy performance and design configurations.
5. Develop research findings in the form of a Web-based decision support tool that is accessible to the public.

PROJECT METHODS

ROOF MODELING AND CALIBRATION

Objective 1: *Effectively model a green roof assembly on a building in an energy-modeling program, and calibrate that model to match existing data.*

Figure 3 – Green roof on Emerson Electric Company Hall.

Task procedure:

- Select an existing building with a green roof installed.
- Collect roof performance data pertinent to the selected building.
- Model the building with energy-modeling software according to reference data collected.
- Run a simulation for the appropriate climate zone, and record the results.
- Compare simulation results to existing data, and identify areas of disagreement/mismatch.
- Calibrate and fine-tune a model so that its performance is closer to that of the selected real green roof.

The research tasks associated with Objective 1 are critical since the collected data from existing facilities were used as reference data for the purpose of model calibration. Considering the variations in climate zones in the U.S., the project selected existing green roof building sites located in three representative climate zones: Los Angeles, California (Climate Zone #3); Rolla, Missouri (Climate Zone #4); and Chicago, Illinois (Climate Zone #5); as defined by the 2012 International Energy Conservation Code (IECC).[9] These selected climate zones have been validated as ideal climatic conditions for vegetation without concern about maintenance, precipitation, and temperature.

Figure 2 – Green roof on Burbank Water and Power Building.

The site chosen for Climate Zone #3 was the Burbank Water and Power Building, located in Burbank, CA (F*igure 2*). Burbank has a Mediterranean climate.

The site chosen in Climate Zone #4 was Emerson Electric Company Hall at the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla, Missouri (*Figure 3*). The climate is humid subtropical, with 48.4 inches (1227 mm) average annual rainfall. As part of the roof renovation, a GAF Gardenscapes green roofing system with an area of 3245 sq. ft. was installed in the year 2013. For Climate Zone #5, we selected the Chicago City Hall (*Figure 4*). The climate is heat-dominant, and the sky condition is clear or cloudy overall, with cloudy conditions in the winter season.

Figure 4 – Green roof on the Chicago City Hall building.

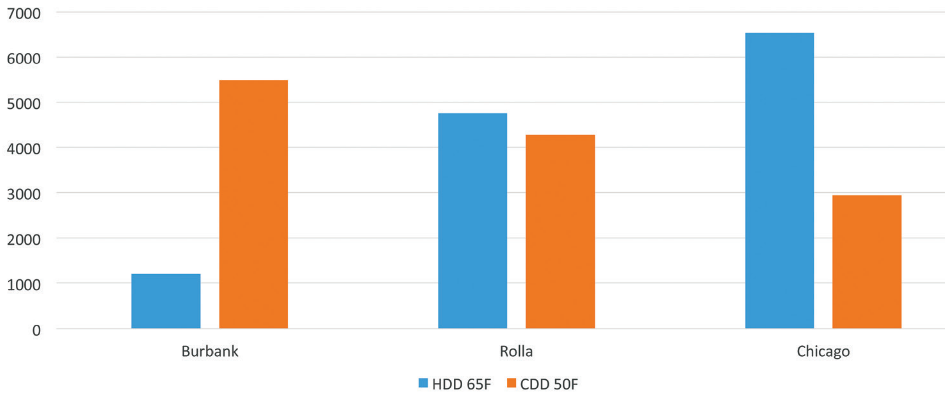

Figure 5 – Heating and cooling degree-days at each selected climate site (Y-axis unit: degree days).

Figure 5 clearly shows different weather patterns at each selected climate site.

Reference Data Collection

For reference data collection at the selected sites, the project adopted LM-35 (thermocouple) and HOBO sensory devices (manufactured by Onset Computer Corporation) to measure dry bulb temperature and relative humidity (RH). All of the data were recoded every ten minutes. In the vegetated area, a sensor was placed under the soil at a depth of 4 inches, and another sensor was placed below the concrete surface from inside the building, as shown in *Figure 6*.

ROOF PARAMETRIC DATA ANALYSIS

Objective 2: *Identify the role of the different parameters of a green roof assembly, and quantify their impact on a building's heating and cooling loads.*

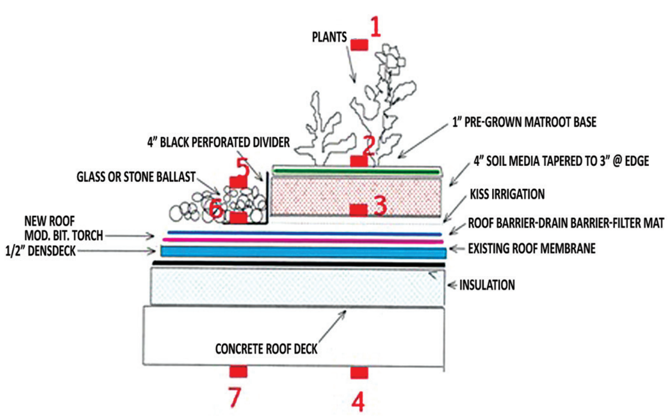

Figure 6 – Section of the green roof showing the placement of sensors.

HOBO 1: Above roof (ambient temperature)
HOBO 2: On top surface of the roof
HOBO 3: Inside the soil
HOBO 4: Beneath the concrete surface roof
HOBO 5: On top of the glass pebbles
HOBO 6: Below the glass pebbles
HOBO 7: Beneath the concrete surface
HOBO 8: At working level (inside building)

Task procedure:

- Correctly and accurately model different layers of green roof assembly.
- Select one parameter (layer) and change its value for each simulation run, and record the impact on the building loads.
- Repeat the process for each parameter, and record the results.

We considered those structural parameters as input variables in the building simulation software. The major physical parameters included height, foliage area (leaf area), leaf reflectivity, leaf emissivity, soil moisture, soil depth, and insulation thickness (*Figure 7*). However, we selected leaf area index, soil depth, and insulation as design parameters to simulate the green roof performance of each selected site climate.

Model Parameters Selected

We selected four major physical parameters in order to narrow down the parameters for parametric testing: leaf area index, soil depth, insulation, and climate type. These are currently adopted for modeling in the Energy Plus – Design Builder interface, based on the computation method designed by Dr. D.J. Sailor.[10] The variables selected in each parameter are as follows:

1) Leaf Area Index
   - LAI = 1
   - LAI = 3
   - LAI = 5
2) Soil Depth
   - 3-in.-thick soil (extensive)
   - 6-in.-thick soil (semi-intensive)
   - 12-in.-thick soil (intensive)
3) Insulation
   - No insulation
   - 4 in. insulation
   - 6 in. insulation
   - 8 in. insulation

THERMAL PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Objective 3: *Determine if a green roof (as a roofing option for different climate types) is a better alternative for cooling a roof in terms of the thermal performance of the building.*
Objective 4: *Estimate environmental performance based on the evaluated energy performance and design configurations.*

Task procedure:

- Replace green roofs with cool roofs (thermal emittance: 0.75) in an energy model, and run simulation.
- Compare the simulation results on the baseline model performance.
- Estimate the environmental performance and water usage/quality man-

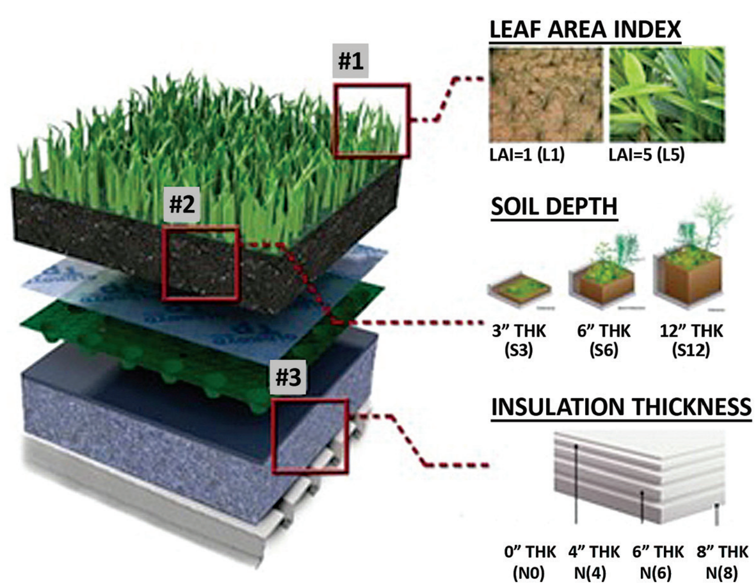

Figure 7 – Test parameters and their subset variables.

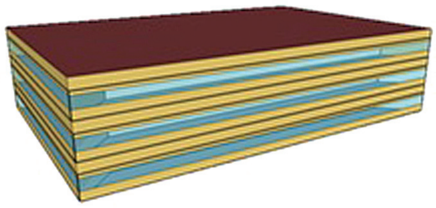

Figure 8 – Isometric view of the baseline model adopted [11].

agement as a function of the energy performance and design conditions.

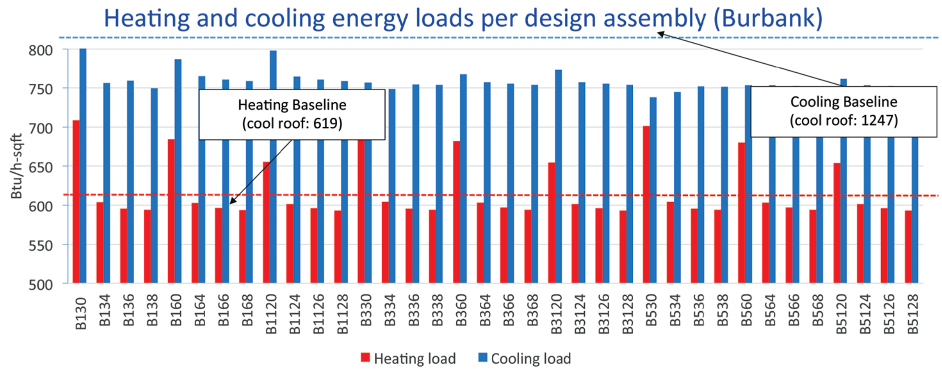

Figure 9 – Heating and cooling energy loads per sq. ft. (Burbank).

Based on the optimized parametric combinations per climate zone (investigated in the previous tasks), we built a prototype building to evaluate the thermal performance of an optimally designed green roof. The building contains 53,600 sq. ft. (163.8 x 109.2 ft.), five zones on each floor, and three stories (*Figure 8*). The code-compliance conditions for ASHRAE 90-1 were applied per climate condition.

DEVELOPMENT OF A WEB-BASED DESIGN DECISION TOOL

Objective 5: *Develop the research findings in the form of a Web-based decision support tool that is accessible to the public.*

Task procedure:

- Complete data interpretation and comparisons.
- Develop reliable computational models to estimate energy and environmental performance for each combination of selected parameters' configured variables of green roofs.
- Develop a Web-based design decision tool that incorporates the estimation models and thermal performance data.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once the baseline validation model was established to simulate each building performance with an acceptable accuracy, the green roof was reconfigured with various parametric combinations of the roof's physical components selected. The simulation test was done for all of the 36 different assembly types in three different climates, with one variable of a parameter being changed with each simulation run, with the purpose of understanding how that variable affected the different thermal performance metrics that had been selected for this project. Thirty-six parametric combinations can be generated based on the three parameters as follows (defined under "Model Parameters Selected," above):

- LAI = Leaf Area Index (unitless) = 3 types
- SD = Soil Depth (inches) = 3 types
- IN = Insulation (inches) = 4 types

The nomenclature followed here is the same as described above and remains consistent throughout the report. For example, "B134" indicates an assembly with LAI = 1, SD = 3 inches, and IN = 4 inches. The other factors considered for simulation were the choice of one hot day and one cold day at each selected climate site.

Burbank, CA (Climate Zone #3)

After simulating a green roof based on various parameter assemblies, the estimated cooling and heating energy loads in each design's peak cooling and heating days, respectively, are summarized in *Figure 9*. The estimated energy loads vary depending on the design assembly.

Per design peak cooling or heating day, a best ten-design assembly was generated, as in *Figures 10* and *11*. These figures illus-

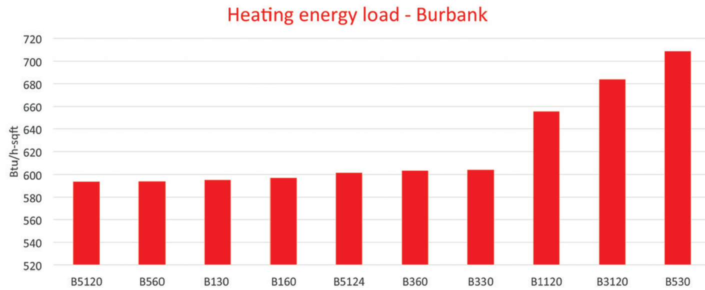

Figure 10 – Heating energy load in Burbank.

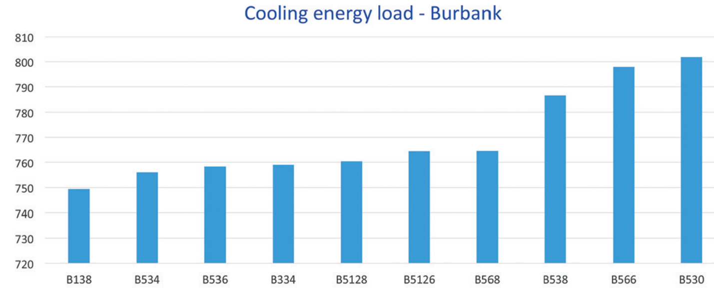

Figure 11 – Cooling load in Burbank.

trate a design assembly that generates the lowest heating energy load.

Rolla, MO (Climate Zone #4)

In *Figure 12* (like Burbank's results), the estimated energy loads vary, depending on the design assemblies. The design assembly with no insulation showed a higher heating energy load than the baseline (adopted cool roof), and the cooling energy load with no insulation also revealed higher values than the baseline in most cases in Rolla. However, LAI with IN seemed to contribute to the cooling energy load reduction significantly. Among the parameters, IN was selected as the most significant attribute to building performance. LAI was estimated as a second significant parameter, while SD was counted as an insignificant attribute.

Per design cooling or heating day, a best ten-design assembly was generated in *Figures 13* and *14*. As illustrated in these two figures, a design assembly generating the lowest heating energy load, for example, does not guarantee its lowest cooling load, or vice versa. This was also similar to the finding in Burbank. Therefore, a duration of each season—i.e., cooling and heating seasons—should be considered to find an optimal design assembly that can minimize a total heating and cooling energy load in a whole year. This feature is discussed below, and the Web-based design support tool incorporated a formula into the design algorithm when the duration of heating and cooling seasons could be considered.

Chicago, IL (Climate Zone #5)

Overall, the findings were very similar to those of Rolla. In the heating energy load analysis, LAI was not a significant component, as compared to IN and SD. However, in the cooling load analysis, all of the parameters were found to be significant variables.

DESIGN DECISION SUPPORT TOOL

Support Model

Since this project considered three climate site conditions, the simulated data from the calibrated models totaled 216 data sets (216 = 36 design assemblies x 3 cities x 2 conditioning seasons [i.e., cooling or heating]). In the Data Collection and Analysis section above, LAI, SD, and IN contributed to the energy load/performance very differently, depending on climate conditions. In addition, a specific design assembly for one season did not guarantee its application to the other season as an optimal design solution. Therefore, the length of cooling or heating should be considered so that we can find an "optimal" design assembly to efficiently fit into the energy-effective performance of a project for one whole year.

Since this project focused on finding an optimal design assembly of the green roof parameters based on the use of simulation data generated by trustworthy simulation models, we put much weight on "differences" of the estimated energy performance by design. A climate condition is one of the significant variables that affects green roof performance and helps determine total building energy performance. Therefore, to establish a design decision algorithm, the project considered major climate condition attributes, which included heating and cooling degree days (HDD and CDD), 99% dry bulb temperature (DB 99) for heating, 2% dry bulb temperature (DB 2) for cooling, mean daily temperature range (MDR) for cooling, and

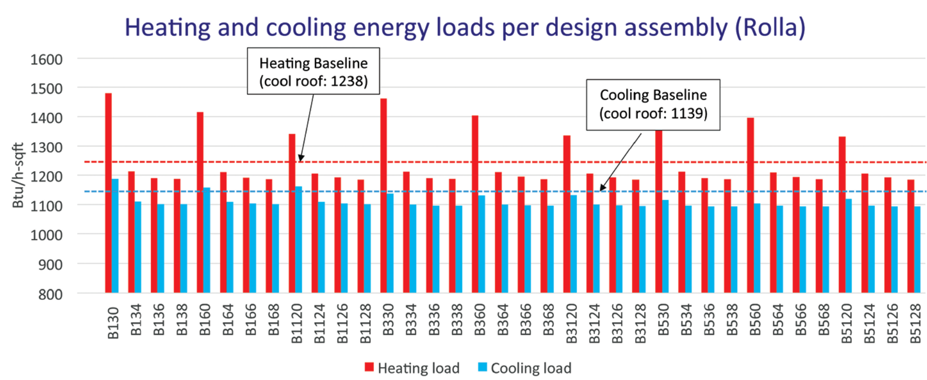

Figure 12 – Heating and cooling energy loads per sq. ft. (Rolla).

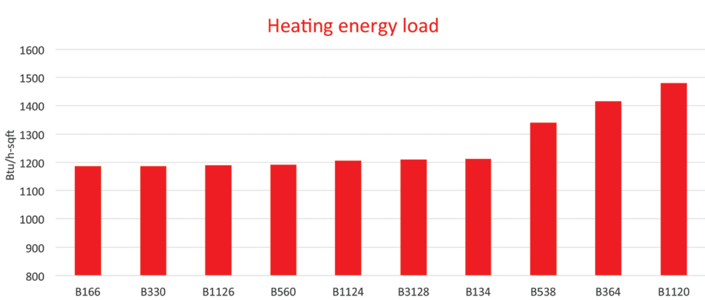

Figure 13 – Heating energy load in Rolla.

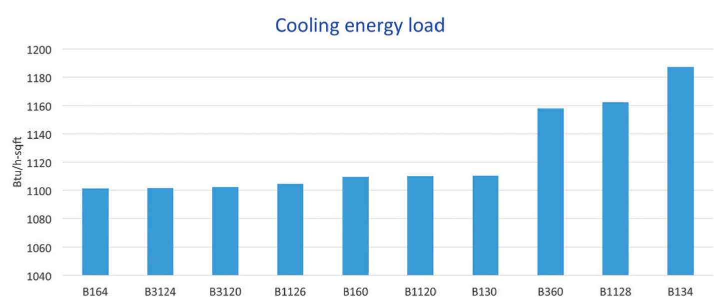

Figure 14 – Cooling energy load in Rolla.

2% wet bulb temperature (WB 2) for cooling. This climate data information was taken from the *ASHRAE Handbook-Fundamentals* and ASHRAE Standard 90.1-2013 [12]. The formulas are as shown in *Table 1*. As shown, the cooling and heating performance models generated R-squared (R-sq) values of 97.59% and 97.74%, respectively. Thus, the study revealed that the variations of cooling and heating performance could be accounted by the developed energy load prediction formulas as a function of LAI, SD, IN, and fundamental climate information by more than 97%.

In *Table 1*, all of the selected variables were statistically significant with p-values (a statistical significance threshold) lower than 0.10 (error rate), except SD (p = 0.17) in the heating energy-load performance estimation.

Based on the estimated energy load per cooling and heating season, HDD and CDD were adopted in this project to estimate the length of each season and to calculate the total energy load for one year. These conditioning time lengths were multiplied to each

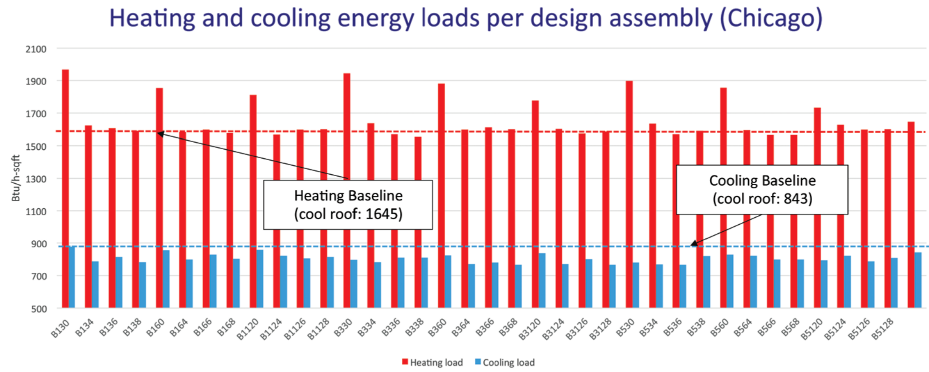

Figure 15 – Heating and cooling energy loads per sq. ft. (Chicago).

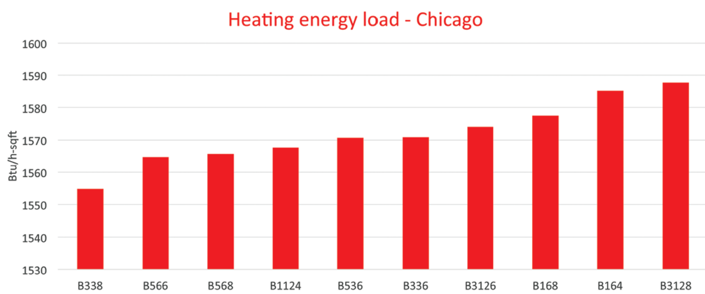

Figure 16 – Total heating load in Chicago.

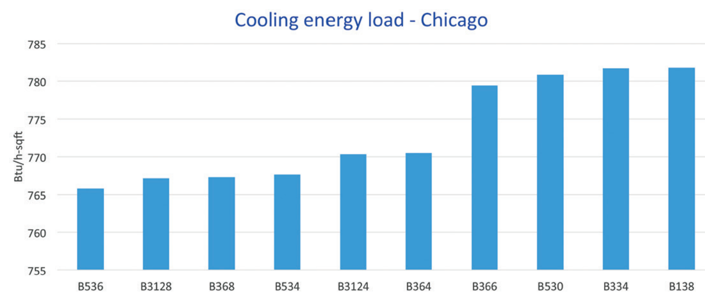

Figure 17 – Total cooling load in Chicago.

	COOLING ENERGY LOAD PERFORMANCE		HEATING ENERGY LOAD PERFORMANCE	
Term	Coefficient	SE Coefficient	Coefficient	SE Coefficient
Constant	32.74	3.63	73.83	2.83
Leaf Area Index (LAI)	-0.2549	0.0573	-0.2311	0.057
Soil Depth (SD)	-0.0407	0.025	-0.0339	0.0249
Insulation (IN)	-0.2967	0.0318	-0.2845	0.0315
Cooling Degree Days (65)	0.003816	0.000247	-0.004988	0.000442
Dry Bulb (2)	-0.2115	0.0312	-0.9792	0.0547
Regression Equation	Energy load (Btu/h/ft2)_1 = 32.74 – 0.2549 LAI – 0.0407 SD – 0.2967 IN + 0.003816 CDD 65 – 0.2115 DB (2)		Energy load (Btu/h/ft2)_1 = 73.83 – 0.2311 LAI – 0.0339 SD – 0.2845 IN – 0.004988 HDD 65 – 0.9792 DB (99)	
R-sq	97.59%		97.74%	

Table 1 – Design decision support regression models. As shown, the cooling and heating performance models generated R-squared (R-sq) values of 97.59% and 97.74%, respectively. Thus, the study revealed that the variations of cooling and heating performance could be accounted by the developed energy load prediction formulas as a function of LAI, SD, IN, and fundamental climate information by more than 97%.

estimated energy load per season, and the calculation results were used to select an optimal design assembly that could minimize the energy load for the whole year.

Web-based design decision tool

The Web-based design tool is available at http://www.hbilife.com/rcif/. This section introduces each page of the tool and provides some instruction on how to use it and how to interpret the design decisions.

1. **"Decision tool" page:** A user can select a state and city of a project site by using a drop-down menu. The embedded database contains data on 300 major cities in the U.S. Once a project site is selected, a summary of weather data, including dry bulb temperature (2% and 99%), wet bulb temperature (2%), and mean daily temperature range, as well as heating (60) and cooling degree (50) days are on the following page.
2. **Result page:** Based on the formula discussed in the previous section, the climate data of a site (selected by a user) and the green roof design assembly are processed to estimate the performance ranking of the assembly options for a cooling/heating energy load, and the estimated energy use intensities (EUIs or $Kbtu/ft^2$) are displayed using the estimation engine embedded in the Web-based tool.
3. **Design recommendation:** Based on the estimated total of EUIs for cooling and heating, the web tool selects a design assembly that provides the lowest EUI estimation for recommending a best design solution for a whole year.

CONCLUSION AND PROJECT LIMITATIONS

Conclusion

The data-driven Web-based decision support tool for a green roof design developed in this project provides a simple, quick, and easy, but evidence-based design solution-finding approach, using an advanced data-mining logic. Building a simulation model is a challenge to construction stakeholders, such as architects, owners, and contractors, mainly due to technical, time, and financial barriers. This developed tool adopts data-driven regression algorithms that are based on best-practice collected data, calibrated simulated models, and computational data-mining strategies in three different climate conditions. Since this design tool is already available to the public, it can be utilized for early design decision-making on any type of green roof project.

Limitations

Limitations with respect to this research involve a lack of field data for validation in other climate zones. Although the United States is divided into six main climate zones, the scope of this research is limited to three climate zones only. Even though this project adopted 216 data sets generated from calibrated simulation models, the data size may not be large enough to generalize the findings and estimations for all U.S. site climate conditions. Therefore, the study of green roof performance in other climate zones would give us a much better understanding of the thermal performance of a green roof that pertains to a specific climate zone. In addition, this project adopted only four parameters—leaf area index, soil depth, insulation, and climate condition. Various other parameters, such as soil moisture, reflectance, emissivity, and absorption could be selected and tested to identify robust findings and to incorporate them into the estimation algorithm.

RECOMMENDATION:

Based on the simulation results of the weather data of Los Angeles, California, for optimal green roof performance, the Green Roof Design Decision Tool can recommend:

Leaf Area Index:	**5**
Soil Depth (inches):	**12**
Insulation Thickness (inches):	**8**

Furthermore, future work could involve consideration of various other architectural parameters, such as types of roofing systems (sloped, flat, shaded, nonshaded, etc.), and different types of buildings, such as museums and hospitals, where an internal heat gain is not critical. Any or all of these could be investigated.

It would also be interesting to study the parameters that affect on-site air temperature and solar shading conditions that are mainly affected by neighboring buildings, especially in a high-rise district in an urban area. The air temperature and bounded solar radiation at a site could vary, depending on the construction of neighboring buildings. To study the impact of these on the site would be an interesting research topic that could help people in calibrating to validate a model in a super-fine resolution. In spite of the environmental benefits of green roofs, one of the main reasons not to choose a green roof may be the possible (technical) difficulty in physical management and the cost of maintenance. It would also be necessary to develop and study life cycle and cost-benefit analyses of green roofs based on the design composition in each climate zone of the U.S.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by a grant from the RCI Foundation.

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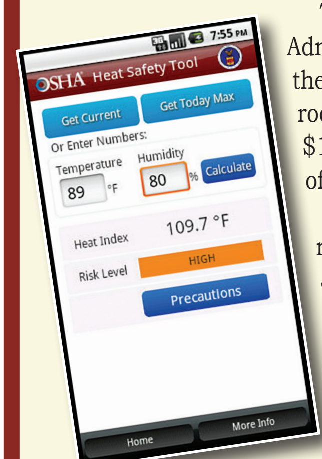
Dr. Choi's primary research interests are in the areas of advanced controls for human-building integration, sustainable building design/performance, and indoor environmental quality. He has published more than 40 research papers in prestigious international journals and peer-reviewed conference proceedings. His academic achievements have been recognized by major research and conference organizations, and he received a Best Paper Award from the Architecture Institute of Korea and a New Investigator Award from the U.S. Architectural Research Centers Consortium.

Roofer's Heat Death Results in OSHA Fine



The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has fined Weathercraft Incorporated, a commercial roofing and waterproofing company, $12,471 following the heatstroke death of a 47-year-old roofer.

Darren Laird was installing roofing materials at Helias High School in Jefferson City, Missouri, on August 17, 2016, when he collapsed. The heat index was approximately 90°F (32°C). He died the next day after being hospitalized with a core body temperature above 107°F (41.6°C).

The employer, charged with the maximum penalty for a "serious" violation, allegedly "exposed employees to the recognized hazard of excessive heat during roofing operations." Weathercraft has received at least five OSHA citations in the past for failing to provide fall protection and fire protection.

"This tragedy occurred on this worker's third day on the job," said Karena Lorek, OSHA's acting director in Kansas City. "His needless death underscores how critical it is for employers to ensure that workers are acclimated to heat conditions. A review of heat-related deaths across industries finds most workers were new to the job and not physically used to the constant heat and sun exposure. Workers should have frequent access to water, rest, and shade to prevent heat illness and injuries during the hot summer months and during hot indoor conditions and be trained to recognize and respond to the signs of heat-related illness."

"If there is any indication of heat stroke, immediately call 911, move the employee to a cooler location, and provide water to try and reduce the core body temperature," Lorek said. "In the summer of 2016, nationwide, OSHA conducted more than 200 heat-related inspections and…[investigated] 13 fatalities."

In 2014, 2630 workers in all industries suffered from heat illness, and 18 died from heatstroke and related causes while on the job, according to OSHA.

OSHA has a "Heat Safety Tool" app that provides the heat index, available in English and Spanish for Android and iPhone devices. Find it at https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/heat_index/heat_app.html.

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