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SUMMARY: Assurity Life's Home Office Facility Will Test Sustainable Landscape Rating System

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The Sustainable Sites Initiative™ (SITES™) announced the selection of the Assurity Center, Assurity Life Insurance Company's new home office facility, as one of the first landscapes to participate in a new program testing the nation's first rating system for green landscape design, construction and maintenance.

The Assurity Center, designed by Lincoln-based Clark Enersen Partners, will join more than 150 other pilot projects from 34 states, Canada, Iceland and Spain as part of an international pilot project program to evaluate the new SITES rating system for sustainable landscapes, with and without buildings. SITES selected the Assurity Center based on its extensive environmentally friendly elements.

"We're very, very excited to be chosen for this international pilot program," said Tom Henning, Assurity chairman, president and CEO. "We anticipate the SITES program will be a growing and very important part of the future of sustainability in our country and the world."

Assurity's project joins the Smithsonian Institution's African American History and Culture museum, a New Orleans project to absorb storm water on the streets of the Lower Ninth Ward flooded during Hurricane Katrina, and other pilot projects that include academic and corporate campuses, public parks with hundreds of acres, transportation corridors and private residences of less than one acre.

Like the other pilot projects, the Assurity site will test the point system for achieving different levels of site sustainability on a 250-point scale, and the performance benchmarks associated with specific credits within the *Guidelines and Performance Benchmarks 2009*.

SITES will use feedback from Assurity's building and the other selected projects during the pilot phase, which runs through June 2012, to revise the final rating system and reference guide by early 2013. The U.S. Green Building Council, a stakeholder in the Sustainable Sites Initiative, anticipates incorporating the guidelines and performance benchmarks into future iterations of its LEED® Green Building Rating System™.

The Assurity Center was chosen based on its primary sustainable practices including its location in a central city redevelopment district and integration of sustainable storm water practices with the landscape. Surface and roof runoff will be directed into an underground cistern created from three abandoned storm drainage structures. Stored water will be used to irrigate site vegetation including the green roof of the new office building.

Additional sustainable design enhancements on the Assurity site will include: vegetated green roofs; use of recycled-content and regionally available building materials, water-conserving plumbing, exterior sunshades to reduce reliance on artificial lighting; efficient heating, air conditioning and electrical systems; site bioswales and a rain garden; indigenous landscape; and pervious site pavement.

The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) is a partnership of the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin and the United States Botanic Garden. SITES was created to transform land development and management practices with the nation's first voluntary rating system for sustainable landscapes, with or without buildings. Sustainable landscapes can clean water, reduce pollution and restore habitats, while providing significant economic and social benefits to landowners and municipalities. As the system's guidelines become the accepted practices, they will transform the ways we design and build on the land, creating landscapes that nourish life for generations to come.