

Best Practices for State Building Energy Code Policy



Improving Energy Efficiency Through Building Energy Codes Policy

Given the growing national concern over the cost and availability of energy resources and the reliability of energy distribution networks, building energy codes serve as logical starting points for cost-effective policies that capture energy savings. States and municipalities are updating existing codes, adopting new codes, and expanding code programs to improve compliance and achieve significant energy and financial savings. Well-designed, implemented, and enforced building energy codes establish the foundation of cost-effective energy policy for the buildings sector. The following are the top five best practice policy measures States and municipalities can use to incorporate and enhance current model energy codes into local laws.

1. REQUIRE STATEWIDE ENERGY CODE

Energy codes define the least efficient buildings that should be constructed. Requiring statewide building energy codes based on the **national model energy codes** represent a unique opportunity to significantly improve energy performance of a new building while reducing peak energy demand, air pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions. The two model energy codes are the International Energy Conservation Code (IECC) and the ASHRAE/IESNA/ANSI Standard 90.1. Selecting the most current national model energy codes (the 2006 IECC and ASHRAE 90.1-2007) for statewide implementation ensures that state building practices reflect changes in technology that offer increased energy efficiency appropriate for each climate zone. It also guarantees free resources and training to support these codes.

2. AUTOMATIC CODE ADOPTION / REVISION CYCLE

Some states and municipalities only periodically update their building energy codes while others have a process in place for regular improvements. An **automatic update** ensures the state code will continue to evolve and reflect changes, requirements, clarifications and new opportunities to increase energy efficiency. States that require the adoption and revision cycle of building energy codes to correspond with the publication of a new edition of a national energy standard or model energy code ensure that building practices remain up to date.

3. INCREASE CODE UNIFORMITY ACROSS STATE

City and county jurisdictions have adopted a variety of energy codes for both residential and commercial buildings. **Increasing the uniformity** of building energy codes across jurisdictions makes it easier and more cost-effective for builders and contractors to construct residential and commercial buildings and be in compliance with code requirements. It also eases the job of code officials in enforcing the appropriate standards.

4. MANDATE CODE ENFORCEMENT

One of the most important steps to make statewide codes effective at saving energy is **proper enforcement** at all levels. States can include legislative language during energy code adoption that mandates compliance. A state may also support and provide training and educational materials for local building officials to prepare them to properly enforce a new code.

5. PURSUE "BEYOND CODE" EFFORTS

States that have building energy codes but are interested in achieving additional cost-effective energy savings can **adopt advanced code amendments**. Another powerful strategy for reducing energy use in buildings is combining energy codes with voluntary programs such as ENERGY STAR, Home Energy Rating System (HERS), or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) systems. The code establishes a bare minimum for energy efficiency while the program encourages innovation and provides incentives for better performance.

To avoid reinventing the wheel, States and municipalities who are interested in adopting new (or updating existing) code legislation can benefit by reviewing actions others have previously taken. For more information on policy actions your state can take to adopt and implement a building energy code, including sample legislation of individual state code reform please take advantage of BCAP's Policy Action Tool at www.bcap-energy.org.

