States Open Doors for Green Building Growth: Another Top 10 List for 2012

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The Connecticut State Capitol in Hartford. Credit: iStockphoto

What's better about a brand new year than top 10 lists? There's already been a 2012 top 10 list for scientific discoveries, for Latin alternative albums, for Michelle Obama's outfits and even a Top 10 Everything… So in addition to last week's announcement about the top 10 states for LEED project activity in 2012, I'm here to pile on and add a top 10 list for state policies that propel green building forward.

From a set of more than 400 bills that we tracked, at least 88 issue-advancing policies were adopted since the August 2011 release of the 2011 state activity report. Like any other top 10 list, there's much more to read than what's listed here. For the full report, see: Advancing Green Building Policy in the States – State Activity Report: 2012.

For the highlights, and in no particular order, here's my "top 10" list of new state laws that advance green building since August 2011.

First, four that stand alone:

1. Affordable Green: Alabama HB 110 directs the state housing agency to integrate energy efficiency and green building into the evaluation criteria for projects funded through the state housing trust fund.

2. OutPACE'ing with PACE: Connecticut SB 501 requires the newly established Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority to develop the nation's first statewide program for commercial properties to tap Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing.

3. Schools Go for Gold: The District of Columbia's Act #19-0336 expands and refines the requirements of the 2006 Green Building Act and, importantly, raises the bar for newly constructed Washington, D.C., public schools from LEED Silver to LEED Gold.

4. You Can't Manage What You Don't Benchmark: Florida HB 7117 requires that energy use in public buildings be benchmarked to ensure that the state has the information it needs to invest in energy efficiency opportunities in public facilities.

Second, four pairs of successful measures that are even more exciting together than they are apart – kind of like a series of a dynamic duos:

5. Greening state facilities duo: California Executive Order #B-18-12 significantly deepens the commitment of state buildings to green building leadership, including greenhouse gas reduction targets, demand response, net-zero energy goals and more. Virginia SB 160, the High Performance Buildings Act, commits most new or renovated state facilities to conform to energy and environmental design guidelines. See my May 2012 blog post on these exciting demonstrations of leadership.

6. Energy efficiency in public buildings duo: New York Executive Order #88 and Oklahoma SB 1096 each established plans and commitments to achieve 20 percent energy reduction in state buildings by 2020. View my colleague's blog post on the recent New York executive order and other government leadership initiatives.

7. Green building tax incentives duo: New Jersey SB 3033 created the Grow New Jersey Assistance Program to provide tax credits for businesses that create or retain a substantial number of jobs and also make capital investments in

accordance with the state's green building manual. New York SB 1462 authorizes municipalities to provide graduated property tax incentives for projects that earn LEED certification.

8. Raising the bar through building codes duo: Maryland's 2012 Building Performance Standards, adopted in November 2011 and effective in January 2012, made Maryland the first state to adopt the newest version of the International Energy Conservation Code, which the U.S. Department of Energy has determined will offer significant energy efficiency improvements over the previous version of the code. California AB 930 more fully integrates sustainability into the decision making process for building code development by establishing an official green building perspective on the state's Building Standards Commission.

And, finally, a couple of exemplary trios:

9. Protections from other building impacts trio: Puerto Rico Law #29 provides a new set of guidelines and directives intended to protect the island's night sky access through light pollution control and reduction. California AB 296 directs the state departments of transportation and environment to work together to define the urban heat island effect and to deliver guidelines and a standard specification for cool pavement surfaces to be used across the state. Indiana Rule 675 IAC 16-1.4 legalized the reuse of greywater in buildings.

10. A schools trifecta: Illinois HB 5195, SB 1652 and HR 906 are three separate measures that, respectively, open the door for schools to benefit from state-led energy efficiency investments, direct public utilities to build green when building training facilities, and promote the Green Apple green schools initiative.

View the full report here. What are you doing in 2013 to help state lawmakers facilitate the growth of the green building marketplace? Get involved with your local USGBC chapter and help us advance one of USGBC's several advocacy campaigns.

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Chapter members, Member employees, USGBC staff

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Senior Facilities Planner, University of Massachusetts/Amherst

What an impressive list of great advances! This is truly inspiring.

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