

# Build Better Codes

*When leadership proves it is possible, effective and efficient, share the benefits broadly.*



## Green Building and the Codes

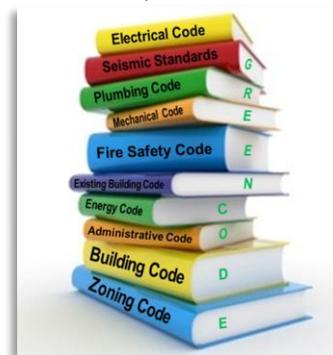
The U.S. Green Building Council has spent the last dozen years working to end the negative impact of buildings on the people that occupy them and the environment that surrounds them. For even longer, building codes have sought to address some, but not all, of these impacts. Through both a growing community of green building professionals and LEED (USGBC's widely-accepted market transformation tool), we are demonstrating that better, greener buildings can slash energy consumption, water use and waste while also restoring natural systems, improving indoor air and benefitting bottom line – and policy makers and the public are taking notice. USGBC supports greening the codes to gain the benefits of green building for all through our *Build Better Codes* campaign.

## LEED and Green Building Codes Work Together

Rating systems like LEED are critical proving grounds for building strategies that address an inclusive set of risks that require our attention, beyond fire safety, disability access, and other crucial areas. Along the way, building codes have presented barriers to the application of more forward-looking technologies, materials and methods. As the viability, cost-effectiveness and many benefits of green buildings continue to prove their worth, the code safety net is evolving to catch this broader scope of responsibility that we now expect of our buildings with a new set of meaningful minimum baselines. A code tells you what to do, and LEED tells the world how well you did.

## Building Tomorrow's Codes Today

Building green requires a multidisciplinary approach to break down the walls between planning, design and construction practice. The codes have been a major contributing factor to the "siloeed," business-as-usual construction process. To address this, governments like the City of New York are greening their codes from the inside out.<sup>1</sup> Others, like the State of California, are adding a new chapter that serves as a one-stop shop for all state green building measures.<sup>2</sup>



Over the course of the last six years, green building policy experts from government, NGOs, and all sectors of the industry have created a national set of "model" green building codes that serve as a first-ever common language for minimum green commercial building practice. The result of this work is now available in the [International Green Construction Code](#) (IgCC) and its [Standard 189.1](#) compliance pathway. USGBC is working with its partner organizations in code development to ensure that buildings designed and built to comply with this set of green building codes are well positioned to contribute to the outcomes that LEED projects deliver.

## Building Bridges to Next-Generation Codes

For generations, building codes have been improving to provide the minimum construction safeguards that address important public health, safety and welfare challenges. In addition to the many benefits that green building codes provide, it is encouraging that \$1 invested in energy code enforcement and compliance yields six dollars in savings.<sup>3</sup>

State and local governments regularly revise building codes to further improve public health, safety and welfare while also considering costs and industry impact. Through this process, government plays a critical role in bringing responsible building practice to all buildings through more comprehensive codes. It can be challenging to get all stakeholders to embrace a broader scope for codes, but progress cannot be made without beginning the discussion. In addition, overworked code officials may need training, support and authority to focus beyond life safety issues that are central to current code enforcement. As such, governments should clearly define the motivation behind improved codes; for example, New York City lists environmental protection in the intent of the code to leave no doubt.<sup>4</sup>

## Better Codes through Engagement

Better, greener codes begin with a community-wide discussion based on values, a long-term view of costs and benefits, and a common understanding that we can expect much more from our buildings. To get there, we must ask:

***"How can we leverage our codes and code officials to extend the benefits of healthier, greener, and higher-performance buildings to all building owners and occupants in our community?"***

<sup>1</sup> Read more on the green code effort in New York City, coordinated by USGBC's local chapter organization, the [Urban Green Council](#).

<sup>2</sup> Read more on the green code effort in California via the [Northern California Chapter of USGBC's](#) green codes portal.

<sup>3</sup> Institute for Market Transformation. "[\\$810 Million Funding Needed to Achieve 90% Compliance with Building Energy Codes](#)." 2010.

<sup>4</sup> "Environmental protection now stands firmly alongside public safety, health and welfare as the core purposes of the Construction Codes," reads a 2012 report on NYC's Green Codes Task Force thanks to Local Law 49/2010. Read more at [Urban Green Council](#).

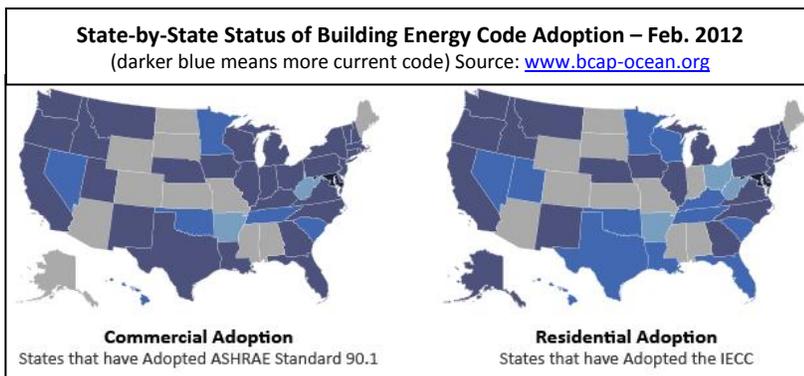


### Code Greening 101 – the Process

- 1. Dialogue:** Convene industry stakeholders and code officials to discuss what works and what does not in the codes being administered in your state or metropolitan area. Insights from green building professionals are needed to demystify better, safer, healthier, more valuable, durable, resilient and efficient buildings.
- 2. Implementation:** Green building practitioners have experience with designs, materials, methods and technologies that may be new to building officials or members of your building community. Offer support through education, training and relationship-building to ensure a comfort level with existing energy codes and green building requirements. An effective system for enforcing these codes is important. [[Learn more here](#)]
- 3. Adoption:** Have a technical task force review the IgCC and its Standard 189.1 compliance path to determine how they may be best integrated into your state or community's minimum regulations alongside an up-to-date building energy code.<sup>5</sup> While local amendments will be common, requiring compliance with these codes will offer major advantages to those seeking the rewards of LEED certification (and should encourage many more), not to mention removing barriers to building green that are common in outdated codes. [See [LEED and green building codes](#)] Keep track of all wins for green building to make sure they are maintained in future updates.
- 4. Repeat:** An advocacy victory that advances green building through the codes should be celebrated, but the new code measures will need to be understood and implemented effectively for successful outcomes. Ultimately, we want [full compliance](#). A critical way green building advocates can influence the adoption dialogue is with a seat on the state or local codes board or commission. In a best-case scenario, this seat may be officially designated (see 2011 [CA AB930](#)).

#### Energy codes and beyond

For green building advocates, building energy codes offer more than minimum regulations to set buildings on track to achieve energy efficiency; they offer a 35-year history of how hard it can be to prioritize the adoption and enforcement of building codes that do more than address acute and short-term life safety risks. Coordinated advocacy efforts in recent years have brought better codes to many cities and states; however implementation is far from perfect even in the most advanced jurisdictions. Given that every \$1 invested in energy code enforcement and compliance efforts yields six dollars in savings,<sup>6</sup> there is much that can be gained by properly implementing the energy codes already on the books (alongside, of course, advancing adoption of current versions).



#### Resources

- USGBC's [draft legislative text](#) to promote better building codes that endorses the greening of the codes, establishes a task force to review the IgCC and institutes a green building perspective on the code review board.
- USGBC resources on LEED and green building codes see [here](#), including: white paper, "[Greening the Codes](#)"; Policy brief, "[LEED and Green Building Codes](#)"; and webinar, "[Green Codes 101](#)."
- USGBC chapter resources: from [Northern California](#), [Urban Green](#) (NYC), [Illinois](#)
- ICC's [International Green Construction Code](#), including ASHRAE [Standard 189.1](#).
- U.S. Department of Energy's [Building Energy Codes Program](#) for sector-specific resources, [contact list](#) of regional energy efficiency organizations, [evaluation support](#) for energy code compliance, and more.
- [Building Codes Assistance Project](#) for [maps](#) with state-by-state facts, [energy codes 101](#), action tools for [consumers](#), info on [Dillon's Rule](#), [Home Rule](#) and more.
- [Institute for Market Transformation](#) for [tips, re-printable brochures and case studies](#) on energy code compliance.
- [Responsible Energy Codes Alliance](#) for state-by-state energy code compliance guides.

**For more information on USGBC's *Build Better Codes* campaign, contact Matt Pearce, Campaign Specialist, at [mpearce@usgbc.org](mailto:mpearce@usgbc.org). For more info on USGBC's advocacy campaigns, visit [www.usgbc.org/campaigns](http://www.usgbc.org/campaigns).**

<sup>5</sup> Section 410 of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 required any state that accepted State Energy Program Funding to adopt, implement and demonstrate 90% compliance with the national model energy codes for residential and commercial construction by 2017. Note the [clarifying statement](#) issued by USGBC and its partners in building energy efficiency on December 1, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Market Transformation. "[\\$810 Million Funding Needed to Achieve 90% Compliance with Building Energy Codes](#)." 2010.