

DOE and NREL: Zero Energy Building with Zero Added Costs?

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DOE and NREL: Zero Energy Building with Zero Added Costs? That's what I call Global Leadership. Now Let's Keep it Up.

On Thursday and Friday of last week, member countries of the [Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation](#) (APEC) group got together to discuss the state of green building, building efficiency standards, and codes within APEC economies. The United States is the 2011 host of this prestigious, trade-based multilateral process, made up of [21 participating countries](#) that comprise approximately 60% of world GDP and more than half of global trade.

At the workshop - Green Buildings and Green Growth: The Enabling Role of Standards and Trade - it became abundantly clear that countries are moving at an astounding pace to implement sustainable building practices and other strategies to reduce energy use. While I was tickled to hear about Chile's new residential energy labeling initiative, and Indonesia's new '[Greenship](#)' [rating system](#), I couldn't help but think as the workshop went on: *What is it going to take to maintain U.S. leadership on green buildings?*

As if to read my mind, USA at APEC did not disappoint. At the end of the two-day workshop, Roland Risser, Program Manager of Department of Energy's Building Technologies Program, wowed the crowd with a splendid testimonial of the [National Renewable Energy Laboratory \(NREL\)'s Research Support Facility](#) in Golden, Colo. – the largest zero energy commercial building in the country, which was designed and constructed to LEED Platinum standards with zero added costs. With the [Better Buildings Initiative](#) (BBI) in his back pocket, Risser had no problem showcasing to everyone in the room that the United States is, and has been, the [trend-setter in green buildings](#).

But we can't quit there. Something tells me USA can't chalk up a W just yet on green buildings. If we are competing against the rest of the world for an edge on the green tech industry and the jobs it will bring, the game isn't nearly over. As the APEC workshop illustrated, there is literally a gaggle of countries that have sprouted green building industries in the last few years that are now growing at lightning speed. Singapore, for instance, has witnessed a 15-fold increase in gross floor area of green buildings in the past five years. They also have a national goal to increase energy efficiency by 35% by 2030 above 2005 levels. When surveyed, 76% of APEC economies reported voluntary green building codes or rating systems for commercial buildings. Meanwhile, [China is beating the United States](#) in high-tech manufacturing exports. The list goes on. (As a reminder folks... the European Union isn't mentioned here because it is not part of the APEC process... lest we forget about that global green giant and their magnificent green targets and timetables.)

So what's a green building trendsetter like the United States to do? Well for goodness' sake, keep on, keepin' on! For the budget makers on the Hill: the United States has the lead – let's not lose it. Now, when we are on the cusp of a new energy revolution and zero energy buildings have just barely begun to break the cost curve, don't slash the White House request for energy efficiency and renewable energy. Instead, set the partisan rhetoric aside and start working with the White House on crafting new policies to help us stay competitive. You can focus on BBI and tax policy for starters.

And for the Administration: Listen to Roland. His theme on Friday was, "Where there's a will, there's a way." Meaningful political commitment to sustainability has proven to be a catalyst for successful implementation and private sector action.

Now how about a few more of those zero energy buildings?

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