

Washington DC's Energy Benchmarking Requirements Begin this Month

January 2010 marks the start of new energy use benchmarking requirements for large Washington, DC buildings under the Clean and Affordable Energy Act (CAEA). Enacted in 2008, CAEA is a comprehensive piece of legislation serving to establish, fund, regulate, and promote sustainable sources of energy. The bulk of the law is devoted to the details of the selection and oversight of a new Sustainable Energy Utility, as well as to the creation of incentive programs to encourage conversion to renewable energy.



Benchmarking

The amendments to the Green Building Act of 2006 made under the CAEA, while not the major thrust of the law, are of the greatest consequence to building owners and managers. Using the Energy Star Portfolio Manager benchmarking tool, building owners will be required to collect and record energy use data, according to the following timetable:



Benchmarking Schedule	
Currently:	Buildings over 10,000sf owned or operated by the District of Columbia
Beginning Jan. 2010:	Privately owned buildings over 200,000sf of gross floor area
Beginning in 2011:	All buildings over 150,000sf
Beginning in 2012:	All buildings over 100,000sf
Beginning in 2013:	All buildings over 50,000sf

Energy consumption data must be submitted to the District Department of the Environment (DDOE), which will make it accessible to the public after the second annual benchmarking, via an online database.

Energy Modeling

New construction and substantial renovation projects for buildings over 50,000sf will be required to estimate energy performance before construction using the Energy Star Target Finder Tool. Annual benchmarking will also be required, with Target Finder and Portfolio Manager data to be made public by DDOE. This portion of the law will apply to projects with building permits issued after January 1, 2012.

What will these new requirements mean for building owners and managers?

The downsides:

- *Public accountability.* While disclosure of energy usage data will likely raise property values for high-performing buildings, it may hurt those already in tough financial straits, with little resources available for upgrades.
- *Extra paperwork.* Collection and filing of benchmarking data can add up to a substantial amount of time and effort.
- *Up-front expenses.* Bringing a low-performing building up to speed before energy use data goes public might be necessary to attract and keep desirable tenants.

The upsides:

- *Lower energy costs.* Performance improvements tend to have an excellent return on investment. Upgrades such as low-e windows, thermal breaks, insulated roofing assemblies, and new sealants often pay for themselves in energy savings.
- *Accountability.* Building owners and managers who are good environmental stewards will now be recognized for their efforts. Prospective tenants and buyers will be able to compare properties based on energy consumption and operating costs, providing an incentive for efficiency.
- *Better air quality.* According to the U.S. Department of Energy, buildings generate 40% of the nation's greenhouse gas emissions. Improving a building's energy profile reduces consumption, which cuts down on emissions.

As the nation's capitol, Washington DC aims to lead the charge toward greener buildings. As such, CAEA is likely to be a launching point for stricter energy performance standards in the future. Making building improvements sooner rather than later not only allows energy cost savings to start adding up, it establishes your building as an energy leader. Plus, getting ahead on the energy curve will position you well should tougher performance standards be enacted.

Founded in 1977, Hoffmann Architects specializes in the rehabilitation of the building envelope. To learn more, contact Robert Doyle at Hoffmann Architects at (703) 253-9800 or r.doyle@hoffarch.com.