

USGBC In the News Details

Title: 'Green' building codes sprout up across USA
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As energy costs rise, more states and cities are adopting policies that encourage or require new construction to be energy-efficient. This week, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, signed into law what he called the nation's strictest "green" building codes.

"There's been a huge groundswell in green-building leadership at state and local levels. It's remarkable," says Jason Hartke of the U.S. Green Building Council, a private group that tracks legislation and sets guidelines that become construction industry standards.

Nearly three times as many cities and counties approved green-building policies last year as did four years ago. A record number of states, 14, took such action last year, as compared with one in 2004, according to the council. So far this year, at least eight states and 22 localities have endorsed green policies.

Hartke attributes the trend to higher energy costs and climate-change concerns. Buildings account for 40% of greenhouse-gas emissions, he says.

Many of the measures require new government buildings to meet the council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. Others give commercial builders incentives, such as tax breaks and expedited permits. A few policies, such as one in Maryland's Baltimore County, give tax credits to builders for green construction of homes.

San Francisco's ordinance requires that all new construction, including homes, and the renovations of large commercial spaces meet standards for conserving energy and water.

"It requires a mandate in order to get people to do what's in their best interests sometimes," Newsom says.

The National Association of Home Builders opposes mandates, says Carlos Martin, assistant staff vice president. He says they increase costs without the assurance that the money will be recouped in lower energy bills.

Florida, Indiana, Maryland, New Jersey, Oklahoma and South Dakota enacted laws this year requiring that new, large state buildings meet LEED standards.

More than a dozen cities and counties did the same, including Chandler, Ariz.; El Paso; Tampa; Monterey, Calif.; Fairfax County, Va.; and Starkville, Miss.

"We're leading by example," says Lynn Spruill, Starkville's chief administrative officer. "We've got to do something to reduce our negative impact on the environment."