



H7617 Building Decarbonization Act of 2024

This bill would start to address emissions from both existing buildings and new construction, with two main sections.

Section 1. Building Benchmarking & Performance Improvement

This bill tackles emissions from large existing buildings by requiring energy reporting – specifically benchmarking energy usage based on a baseline year – and then subsequent emission reductions over time. It would provide Rhode Island’s building owners, state agencies, and policymakers with necessary baseline data on emissions from large buildings to inform a building performance standard, by which said buildings must gradually reduce their emissions.

The building sector makes up 30% of all greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the state, and we do not currently have a clear pathway to reduce these emissions. A building energy benchmarking requirement and subsequent standard is the number one policy we can implement this year to address emissions from large existing buildings. Tackling these emissions is critical to achieve the Act on Climate’s mandate of net-zero by 2050; around 70% of our building stock that will exist then is already in place today.

Building Energy Reporting: Requires large buildings to report their energy usage and GHG emissions to a central data repository such as ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, a free and secure EPA platform used by nearly half a million buildings nationwide.

- Buildings Covered by Reporting Requirements (estimated 2,320 total):
 - Starting 2025: Public buildings larger than 25,000 sq ft
 - Starting 2026: Private buildings larger than 50,000 sq ft
 - Starting 2027: Private buildings larger than 25,000 sq ft
- The data collected will:
 - Help building owners measure their energy usage and emissions, compare to buildings of similar size and uses, and implement ways to reduce their energy usage and costs.
 - Enable the state to perform analyses and develop a standard by which large buildings must reduce their emissions.

Evaluation & Creation of a Building Performance Standard: Requires the Office of Energy Resources (OER) to evaluate benchmarking data, consult with stakeholders, and create a building performance standard (BPS) for large buildings to reduce emissions in line with the Act on Climate.

- OER to analyze building energy data and publish reports.
- OER to create a BPS to address existing building emissions by setting long-term energy or emissions intensity reduction targets, with interim compliance milestones.
- OER to provide technical assistance to support owners in meeting interim or final BPS’s.

Establishes Framework for Effective Programs: Designates the Green Building Advisory Committee (GBAC) established by RIGL 37-24-5(g) as an advisor to the OER on the implementation of building

benchmarking and performance standards. Requires the creation of an Environmental Justice Advisory Board (EJAB) to advise OER on the equitable implementation of building benchmarking and performance standards. Also, OER is to estimate capacity and budgetary needs annually and provide to the General Assembly.

RI Would Follow Larger Markets. There are currently 6 states and 50 municipalities with building energy benchmarking policies. 4 states, 1 county, and 7 municipalities have also adopted a building performance standard with dozens more in development. In a small state such as Rhode Island, it makes the most sense to implement these policies statewide, in line with the Act on Climate. If we want to achieve the Act on Climate mandates, we must reduce our emissions from large existing buildings. This legislation will put us on track to do that.

Section 2. All-electric new construction

Addresses emissions from new construction by providing tiers by which new buildings must become all-electric in alignment with the Act on Climate. The tiers are as follows:

1. Requirement for electric-ready construction of new buildings

Effective after December 31, 2024, all permits for new construction or alterations must include an electrical system that provides sufficient capacity for a future retrofit of a mixed-fuel building to an all-electric building.

2. Requirement for all-electric construction of public buildings, including schools

Effective after December 31, 2024, all permits for new public construction or alterations must be all-electric. Includes labor standards and apprenticeship utilization requirements for public projects over a certain dollar amount.

3. Local approval of all-electric new construction

Effective immediately, through local approval, municipalities can require that only permits for all-electric new construction and alterations within their jurisdiction be issued.

4. Requirement for all-electric construction of new buildings

Effective after December 31, 2026, all permits for new construction of buildings statewide must be all-electric.

Provisions for Housing and Electricity Affordability: Requires that the Housing Resources Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and the EJAB, propose changes to ensure that the production of affordable housing is not compromised. In addition, the Public Utilities Commission is directed to initiate a proceeding to examine innovative solutions to address energy burden and energy affordability in all-electric buildings.

Exemptions: If the building is specifically designated for occupancy by commercial or industrial uses which cannot feasibly operate using commercially available all-electric appliances. Specific exemptions for hospitals, medical facilities, or laboratories for biological research.

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