

Nation-leading climate legislation:

The Clean Energy DC Building Code Amendment Act, B24-0420

On July 12th, the DC Council unanimously passed the Clean Energy DC Building Code Amendment Act. The Building Code Amendment Act is essential legislation to implement the District's aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals and is among the strongest bills in the nation.

The Building Code Amendment Act will ensure that all new and substantially-renovated commercial, government, and multi-family residential buildings built in DC after 2025 are built to be “net-zero energy” standards – using no more energy on an annual basis than they can supply on site or procure from renewable sources. The bill will ensure that new buildings are constructed so they are highly energy efficient, produce renewable energy on-site, and result in lower energy costs over the long term for business and residents. The bill also specifically prohibits on-site fuel combustion for the provision of thermal energy to the building.

More than 70% of DC's greenhouse gas emissions come from homes and buildings, tens of thousands of which continue to be heated and supplied with hot water by burning methane gas. Methane gas produces carbon dioxide when it burns and is a very powerful greenhouse gas in its own right. In 2019, the last year in which a greenhouse gas emissions inventory is complete, methane gas burning in DC's homes and buildings contributed more than 1.7 million metric tons of greenhouse gas to the atmosphere.

Because CO² can persist in the atmosphere for a century or more, humans have dug themselves into a real hole when it comes to preventing the climate changes that will fundamentally disrupt how we live. At the very least, the Building Code Amendment Act implements the common-sense adage “when you're in a hole, stop digging.” Following its passage, we will need to focus much harder on retrofitting existing buildings.

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