

Is it Time to Seize the Day? Reaping the Efficiency Benefits of Codes and Standards

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There is a lot of interest at both the state and federal level in building energy codes and appliance efficiency standards and compliance; energy efficiency program administrators in the west and east have begun to develop Codes and Standards as part of their overall energy efficiency policy and/or program portfolio. While several studies document the potential savings, evaluating and claiming the impacts of the new program activities presents challenges at the policy and program levels. This paper reviews key developments that are being addressed on both coasts and at regional and national levels. Examples include ARRA, NAPEE/SEE Action efforts, state government roles, regional projects, national standards updates, building performance, and “stretch” code policies. It considers where and how some of these efforts are coordinated (or not). Also, it provides recommendations for what steps, decisions or policies are needed to keep momentum going. It builds on a recent workshop that helped shed light on what some regulators, state planners, efficiency program administrators, and evaluators view as priority next steps and directions in which it might evolve.

Why Codes and Standards

The aims of Codes and Standards programs are to advocate for better codes, provide training support to increase compliance, document efforts, evaluate benefits and costs, keep new technologies in the pipeline, and support relevant federal standards or set state standards and apply for an exemption from preemption.

Challenges

One of the challenges is that disincentives cloud what should be a relationship between efficiency programs and Codes and Standards. Codes and Standards shift the baseline higher, displacing savings that would have been available and make it harder for conventional efficiency programs to reach their goals. In order for administrators of some efficiency programs to support and justify any efforts and expertise they can provide, it is important for them to claim energy savings or somehow get credit from Codes and Standards.

Simple questions need to be addressed: What are the savings from Codes and Standards? What actions and activities caused the Codes and Standards energy savings to happen? Who should get the credit/who should be able to claim the savings? How are Codes and Standards savings organized for goal setting and for planning/forecasting? However, working through the issues can be complex, in particular, attribution, how to claim savings, and how to integrate this with other building energy performance policy. The presence of many stakeholders with varying

perspectives adds complexity. Regulators can play a role by creating an environment where program administrators can get benefits, weighing Codes and Standards benefits and costs in the context of existing mandates or directives, considering mechanisms for program administrators to get credit, encouraging coordination amongst stakeholders, and facilitating petitions for exemption from federal preemption of certain state standards. Regional and/or national coordination can also play a significant role in working through issues and leveraging funds and enhancing consistency.

Conclusions

The paper concludes that reaping benefits from codes and standards requires overcoming evaluation challenges as well as challenges associated with evolving local and national policy and non-traditional program designs.