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State upping mandates for green building

Most rigorous code requirements for energy-efficiency take effect Aug. 1

K KAUFMANN • THE DESERT SUN • JUNE 21, 2009

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California — and the Coachella Valley in particular — could have some of the most energy-efficient buildings in the nation come Aug. 1.

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The state is upping the ante on green building codes by raising its own requirements for energy-efficient construction, known as Title 24, which is already recognized as the most rigorous in the United States.

The 2009 update of the code will raise the energy efficiency of new construction in California 15 percent to 20 percent from the previous standards set in 2005, and more than 20 percent above national standards set by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Retrofits and renovations done after Aug. 1 also will have to meet the 2009 code.

Translated into dollars and cents, that could mean any new homes built under the code will save their owners \$200 to \$600 per year on energy bills, said Fred Bell, executive director of the Building Industry Association's Desert Chapter.

"That's a real moving target," Bell said. "A lot of it depends on where the house is, how it's oriented. Some may save more, some less, depending on lifestyle."

The code will include more detailed green building standards that provide guidelines for site development, water conservation, sustainable building materials and waste recycling — provisions that will bring it closer to the U.S. Green Building Council's program LEED, which is considered the gold-standard for green building.

"If you do a side-by-side comparison, you're going to see the vast majority of things (in the California Green Building Standards Code) exceed what LEED has," said Russell Grance, director of building and safety for Palm Desert.

While the other parts of Title 24 will be mandatory on Aug. 1, the green building guidelines will start as voluntary, said David Walls, executive director of the California Building Standards Commission, which wrote and will administer the code.

"Our goal was to look at LEED (and other codes) and to draw from all of those," Walls said.



Local architect Lance O'Donnell finished building his new, LEED-certified home in March, which could end up being one of the only LEED certified homes in Palm Springs. (Omar Ornelas, The Desert Sun file photo)



Construction work continues in the background as Coachella Mayor Eduardo Garcia (left) shakes hands with Coca-Cola San Diego market unit Vice President Ken Ramirez during a groundbreaking ceremony on Feb. 19 for the environmentally friendly Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Southern California Sales and Distribution Center in Coachella. (Crystal Chatham, Desert Sun file photo)



Construction was under way June 3 on the Riverside County Sheriff's Department's new 85,000-square-foot Palm Desert station along Gerald Ford Drive in Palm Desert. The building is designed to meet LEED gold certification. The building will have photovoltaic solar panels, energy-efficient windows and air conditioning, skylights, and water-efficient drains and toilets. (Crystal Chatham, The Desert Sun)

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cactuscool wrote:

Kudos to Superior Lamp for taking the initiative to respond and promote their products. This is a direct result of reading the article and my critical comments. Excellent reactionary motivation! Now if more folks take the time to do this, we can support such organizations/corporations. Visit their website and learn about their great products!

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cactuscool wrote:

One need only visit "green" projects in existence for four or more years to see that the net efficiency ratios are not as promised. I agree that we must strive for more sustainable & efficient building methods & construction/finishing products. We must also view the current trend as little more than another marketing scheme to attract business. Please neighbors, do not be fooled by the skewed numbers in these studies. The analysis does not account for the harm to environment from foreign manufacturing & the lax standards of third-world countries producing the vast majority of our building products today. The very folks who want to be all "green" are the same folks who would picket any corporation polluting a river or employing child/slave labor to crank out more cheap crap for our consumption. This includes cabinetry, plumbing fixtures, light bulbs, rugs, textiles, furniture, electrical components & ceiling fans, all of which are featured in today's green homes. PEACE.

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WHY BUILDING CODES MATTER

California has been leading the nation in green building since it passed its first energy-stingy building code in 1978.

The state's population has risen since then from 22 million to 38 million.

But per capita energy use has remained flat throughout that time, at about 7,000 kilowatt hours per person, compared with an average 12,500 kilowatt hours per person in the rest of the U.S.

Source: California Energy Commission

THE CODES

All green building codes aim to cut energy use, as well as promote water conservation and recycling of building materials. The major players in the Coachella Valley:

Title 24: California's green building code, established in 1978 and updated every three to four years. It sets the minimum standards for all new construction, renovations and retrofits across the state. The most recent update, effective Aug. 1, includes new green building standards. The state has set a goal of reaching net-zero energy efficiency — buildings that are energy self-sufficient — by 2020 for residential construction and by 2030 for commercial construction.

LEED: Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design or LEED certification program has become a major marker for a project's eco-credentials. In addition to energy-efficient design, it also looks at a range of issues, including site development, ongoing performance and transportation links. The Palm Desert Visitor Center was the first building in the Coachella Valley to get a LEED certification. Other LEED projects in the valley include the Coca-Cola distribution center in Coachella and the new Riverside County sheriff's station, also in Palm Desert.

California Green Builder: Developed by the Building Industry Association, this code is 15 percent more energy efficient than Title 24 and also looks at multiple aspects of construction. Cathedral City, Indio, La Quinta and Palm Springs have adopted Green Builder as their green building codes. In Palm Desert, it is an option for complying with the city's green building requirements.

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