



International treaties and climate change takes backseat

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In response to the U.S.' reluctance to sign on to international or federal climate change legislation, cities across the country are taking the lead as early adopters of climate change policies. N.Y.C.'s PlaNYC - the Greener, Greater Buildings Plan, requires all buildings 50,000 s/f or greater to be benchmarked for energy and water consumption by May 1. Benchmarking is a way to measure energy and water use at a building and compare its efficiency with other buildings of similar size and type. The goal is that benchmarking will create a greater understanding of how much energy and water buildings are actually consuming and lead to more sustainable practices and greener technologies to improve building efficiency. With the legislation deadline quickly approaching, real estate owners and managers are scrambling to gather their 2010 energy bills and learn how to use benchmarking software tools.

Historically, there have been a series of efforts at developing international legislation to regulate greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). One of the most notable non-participants to the Kyoto Protocol; the treaty which attempts to reduce GHGs to 1990 levels by 2012, was the U.S. which accounts for the most significant percentage of emissions. In addition, the U.S. has conceived a variety of federally proposed climate change solutions, none of which were signed into law. States, cities, towns and counties across the U.S., are enacting policies and programs to reduce GHGs. Leadership at a local level may lay the groundwork for policy implementation at a national and international level and in the meantime, cities are working at reducing emissions while legislation takes a back seat to other pressing issues.

The Greener, Greater Buildings Plan includes four pieces of legislation geared at improving the energy efficiency of buildings which as a sector accounts for approximately 80% of citywide energy consumption; more than autos, trucks, and rail combined. One pressing piece of the legislation is benchmarking energy and water consumption for compliance with Local Law 84.

The saying used to describe the benefits of benchmarking is "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Measuring and understanding energy consumption is a step toward reaching N.Y.C.'s GHG goals. The suite of laws is expected to reduce annual citywide greenhouse gas emissions by 4.5 million metric tons of CO₂e by 2030, which is equivalent to nearly 7.5% of citywide 2005 baseline emissions. Benchmarking will open a myriad of opportunities for building owners and property managers to analyze their buildings from a different perspective and seize opportunities to focus their energy efficiency efforts more effectively.

For more information on Healthy Buildings benchmarking and other sustainability consulting services, contact Gwen at gsheinfeld@healthybuildings.com or 917-775-0215.

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