Major progress expected on Oregon building decarbonization in 2023 legislature

Bill passes forming the Resilient, Efficient Buildings Task Force to propose new state policies

SALEM, Ore. -- Recognizing homes and buildings are Oregon’s second largest source of climate pollution, only slightly behind transportation, and they’re our first line of defense against climate-fueled harms like extreme heat and wildfire smoke, the Legislature passed a bill (SB 1518) to set up the Resilient, Efficient Buildings (REBuilding) Task Force.

“Widespread action is needed to make our existing and new homes and buildings ready for a clean energy future and for the climate crisis,” said Meredith Connolly, Oregon Director of Climate Solutions. “Oregon has fallen behind in innovative policies to improve homes and buildings so they’re more resilient, affordable, and healthy. Oregonians hear this commitment from their elected leaders loud and clear and look forward to results later this year.”

The comprehensive 27-member REBuilding Task Force will be made up of legislators, green builders, labor, environmental justice, climate, energy efficiency, housing affordability advocates, and more. It is directed by the legislation to propose new policies for consideration in the 2023 legislative session.

The Task Force’s scope of work is necessarily wide-reaching and ambitious including policies to help new and existing homes and buildings reach Oregon’s targets for reducing climate pollution, increase energy efficiency, improve health and air quality, and build resilience to climate harms like wildfires and heat waves.

“Inefficient homes and buildings powered by fossil fuels lead to high energy bills, unhealthy indoor air, and extreme temperatures for Oregonians who can least afford it: low-income, Black, Indigenous, people of color, people with disabilities, and rural folks,” said Joel Iboa, Executive Director of the Oregon Just Transition Alliance. “There must be a major transition in how efficient and healthy our buildings are, and central to the REBuilding Task Force’s mission will be to make sure all Oregonians benefit in that transition.”

“Cities and towns across Oregon are growing rapidly and are looking to partners at the state level for policy tools to ensure we can build smart, efficient, and in a way that prepares us for the climate future we know is coming,” said Beaverton Mayor Lacey Beaty. “Beaverton and other cities have climate action plans, but we need reinforcing state policies to help us meet our goals for climate-friendly, healthy, and resilient communities for all.”

"Making housing more affordable for homeowners and renters also means reducing the living costs of housing. Building energy efficient homes helps alleviate homeowners from high energy costs which contributes to lasting affordability,” said Tess Freeman, Outreach Coordinator at Kôr Community Land
“Trust. “In Kôr's experience as affordable, goal net zero home builders, our homeowners enjoy significant energy bill savings, improved indoor air quality during wildfires and overall healthier homes.”

“Oregon is overdue for major progress on policies and investments for homes and buildings to help our state reach its target for reducing climate pollution. Among the many benefits, taking action will be a job creator and a money saver,” said David Heslam, Policy Committee Co-Chair for the Zero Coalition. “It’s not a question of technology. Many builders are already using efficient electric heat pumps, efficient construction practices, and climate-friendly materials to affordably reduce energy waste significantly lower than current standards. We need to make sure every builder in Oregon is doing their part.”

"More efficient buildings mean lower energy bills for utility customers," said Jennifer Hill-Hart, Policy Manager for the Oregon Citizens' Utility Board. "The REBuilding Task Force will propose legislation in 2023 to improve new and existing buildings while prioritizing benefits and incentivizing improvements for those who need them most."

“Cleaner buildings mean less climate and air pollution, and healthier, more affordable living environments for today and generations to come,” said Nora Apter, Climate Program Director for Oregon Environmental Council. “Extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and air pollution are killing and sickening Oregonians. Our first line of defense are energy-efficient homes and buildings that keep pollution and smoke out and cooling and heating in for comfort, while saving people money on utility bills.”

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Renew Oregon is a clean energy advocacy coalition of businesses and workers, healthcare professionals and parents, farmers and ranchers, faith and community organizations, and individuals coming together to move our state away from polluting energy to a clean energy economy. We are working to create good-paying jobs for all Oregonians, protect air and water from pollution, and help families stay healthy.