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Contact: Kristina Kershner
Architecture 2030
505 988 5309
Kershner@architecture2030.org

Cracking the Code

A Much-Awaited Approach for Dramatically Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions

SANTA FE, NM – In a major announcement today, Architecture 2030 released an unprecedented and much-anticipated guide for every city, county and state in the nation to swiftly meet their greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets through existing building codes. Architecture 2030 is the non-profit research organization that issued the 2030 Challenge, the widely adopted plan for dramatically reducing GHG emissions in the Building Sector. Published in a new white paper, titled “Meeting the 2030 Challenge Through Building Codes”, a single chart provides the key to deciphering various building energy codes and standards as they relate to the immediate 50% reduction target called for in the 2030 Challenge.

According to Edward Mazria, executive director of Architecture 2030, “meeting reduction targets through existing codes is the critical ‘missing piece’ to getting major reductions underway immediately.” Michelle Wyman, executive director of the US branch of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, an international membership association of over 700 local governments, agrees. “Mayors have unanimously adopted the 2030 Challenge and have been eager to implement it. Being able to do so through existing building energy codes will allow them to move much more quickly with strong, measurable reductions in building emissions,” she said.

More and more governments and professionals across the US are looking to the 2030 Challenge as an effective way to tame the excessive CO₂ emissions of the Building Sector. Buildings are the major contributor to climate change, being responsible for almost half of all US energy consumption and GHG emissions. The 2030 Challenge calls for a 50% reduction in energy consumption, including fossil fuel, GHG-emitting energy, of all new buildings and major renovations by 2010, and for incrementally increasing the reduction every five years, so that all new buildings are carbon neutral by 2030.

The urgent need for a code-based approach prompted Architecture 2030 to develop ‘code equivalents’, which are the additional reductions needed beyond the requirements of a particular code, standard or rating system to meet or exceed the initial 50% target of the 2030 Challenge. These code equivalents can be easily incorporated into existing codes by ordinance.

Ken Colburn is Senior Consultant for the Center for Climate Strategies, a non-profit organization that has worked with more than 20 states to design, launch, and successfully manage the creation of comprehensive state climate action plans that significantly reduce GHG emissions. According to Colburn, “By comparing current building codes to the level of greenhouse gas reductions called for by the global scientific community to stem global warming, Architecture 2030 has taken a giant step toward delivering those very reductions.”

R.K. Stewart, 2007 president of the American Institute of Architects, the first organization to adopt the 2030 Challenge, also expressed the importance of Architecture 2030’s white paper. “Using the recommendations offered in this white paper to improve energy performance beyond current regulations and standards will enable us to act both decisively and immediately to bring energy use in the Building Sector under control.”

Architecture 2030 believes that states, local governments and professional organizations are the real heroes on climate change. “They have taken the lead on addressing this crisis. We are excited to be able to provide them with such a useful and powerful tool for making the 2030 Challenge a reality in their communities,” said Mazria.

The success of the 2030 Challenge is attributed to the fact that it can be implemented immediately, it spawns the creation of many new, local, permanent jobs and it is much more cost effective than other approaches, such as nuclear and coal with carbon capture and storage. Architecture 2030 released its own study, ‘The 2030 Blueprint’, last month, providing a side-by-side analysis of various approaches to emissions reductions, showing unequivocally that building energy efficiency via the 2030 Challenge is the clear winner.

Architecture 2030 is not the only group coming to this conclusion. According to Coburn, “In state after state, analyses by the Center for Climate Strategies, the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy, McKinsey & Company, and others demonstrate that steps to achieve substantial greenhouse gas reductions from residential, commercial, and industrial buildings are not only possible, they are available today and can provide significant net cost savings, more jobs, and other economic benefits where implemented.”

About Architecture 2030

By galvanizing and collaborating with the key players in the Building Sector, including the US Conference of Mayors (USCM), Department of Energy (DOE), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), US Green Building Council (USGBC), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), American Institute of Architects (AIA), American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE), International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), and many others, Architecture 2030 is working to achieve a dramatic reduction in the global-warming-causing greenhouse gas emissions of buildings by changing the way they are designed and constructed. In addition to issuing the highly successful 2030 Challenge, Architecture 2030 has also published several key works, including ‘Nation Under Siege’, a seminal study revealing the devastating effects on the US of just one meter of sea level rise, and ‘Think You’re Making a Difference?’, an eye-opening look at the power of conventional coal to thwart all efforts to address climate change.

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