



Fast Facts

Opportunity: The Atlanta Regional Commission estimates that over half the buildings that will be in the metro area in 2025 have not yet been designed or built.

Environment: EarthCraft House, a market-based green building program of the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association and Southface, has certified over 5,000 homes which exceed the state energy code by over 25 percent. The energy savings quickly repay the costs of the energy efficiency features.

Economy: Making buildings energy efficient creates jobs that cannot be exported overseas and stops the export of energy dollars from Georgia.

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Save Energy and Water with Energy-Efficient Buildings

What's at Stake?

The Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) reports that nearly all of our primary energy is imported from other states and foreign countries. Through the development of energy efficiency and Georgia-based renewable energy resources, such as biomass and solar, the state can reduce energy imports, strengthen local economies, create quality jobs and protect water and other natural resources.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), buildings consume over a third of the total energy in our society—roughly equal parts for commercial and residential buildings. Additionally, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) reports that buildings use two-thirds of U.S. electricity generation and are responsible for 48% of greenhouse gas emissions. Of critical importance to Georgia is the link between energy and water. The production of electricity is one of the largest users of fresh water in Georgia—roughly 1 gallon of water is evaporated for each kilowatt-hour of electricity generated. Therefore, a pragmatic energy policy will help alleviate Georgia's water challenges.

Employing standard, off-the-shelf energy efficiency technologies can cut building energy consumption 25 to 50%, providing attractive rates of return on investment. Tracing energy cost-savings upstream leads to additional savings accrued when including the water consumption required in the generation of power.

Challenges

As a major building owner, the State of Georgia has a valuable opportunity to cut energy waste and save taxpayers' money, yet current policy restricts the state in its ability to leverage private incentives to finance energy improvements. Other southern states rely on Energy Performance Contracts, agreements with private energy services companies (ESCO), which use future energy savings to pay for the entire cost of a building's energy efficiency retrofits. Today, Georgia law inhibits the state's use of Energy Performance Contracts.

Georgia has been proactive about adopting a mandatory statewide energy code for residential and commercial buildings; however, enforcement of the energy code is left to under-resourced local jurisdictions. In many communities, code enforcement staff is limited and code officials focus primarily on health and safety issues. A recent DOE study concluded the average time spent by a local code official on energy code compliance is ten minutes.

Next Steps

- The General Assembly should pass legislation which lays out clear statutory authority for state agencies to engage in Energy Performance Contracts to cut energy waste in their facilities
- Georgia should commit that all new state facilities and major renovations must be certified under the federal Energy Star program.
- Georgia should provide incentives to local governments to bolster enforcement of the building energy code.