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## State is first to OK green building standards

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California on Thursday became the first state in the nation to approve green building standards to cut energy and water usage, a move that officials say will help the state meet its ambitious goals to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

The plan, adopted by the California Building Standards Commission, requires that all new construction - from commercial buildings to homes, schools and hospitals - reduce energy usage by 15 percent, water use by 20 percent and water for landscaping by 50 percent. A voluntary form of the code is scheduled to kick in on July 1, 2009.

"There is no statewide standard in the nation such as our green building standard," said commission chairwoman Rosario Marin. "In fact, we're the first one in the world, and we anticipate others to follow us."

The rules do not specify how to make the reductions, but ideas range from installing energy-efficient appliances and increasing natural lighting to using low-flow toilets and planting drought-resistant vegetation. The code will be voluntary while the commission works on a mandatory regulation, which the panel hopes to have in place by end of 2010 or beginning of 2011, Marin said.

Environmental groups and the California Building Industry Association applauded the 11-member commission's 10-0 vote Thursday to approve the standards as a good first step.

Making buildings more efficient will be an important piece in helping California meet its ambitious goal under AB32, a landmark law to fight global warming by reducing the state's greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent by 2020.

Carbon emissions related to buildings - everything from lighting to heating water - represent about 25 percent of the state's total greenhouse gas emissions, second only to the transportation sector, according to the California Air Resources Board.

"The new standard is a huge step in greening our state and greening our nation," Marin said.

The commission's action came after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed legislation last year that would have instituted a green building code for the state, arguing that the commission, not the Legislature, should draw up the regulation.

The governor, who signed AB32 into law two years ago, on Thursday applauded the panel's

decision.

"By adopting this first-in-the-nation statewide green building code, California is again leading the way to fight climate change and protect the environment," Schwarzenegger said in a statement.

The statewide building code will not prevent cities and counties from enacting their own green codes with reductions that are stricter than the state rules, state officials said. San Francisco is considering a green building code, and Oakland City Council President Ignacio De La Fuente announced Thursday he is crafting a similar plan.

The state commission, in a move to appease local governments, made changes to ensure that the new state code would be a minimum standard, not a maximum, Marin said.

"What we have is the floor, not a ceiling," she said.

Craig Noble, a spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group, said he was "encouraged that the commission made some amendments to strengthen the new standards. ... This is a good first step, a solid foothold to build upon a new mandatory code later."

John Frith, vice president of the California Building Industry Association, called the new code a "cost-effective yet meaningful way" of making green buildings widespread across the state.

"What we did not want to see is a huge increase in the number of more extreme and more costly programs," he said, adding that giving builders the flexibility to choose how to reduce energy and water consumption will be helpful to his industry and consumers.

But the debate over the state's green building code is far from over as the commission plans to come up with a new mandatory standard.

Environmental groups are calling for clearer language in the state building code that would allow cities and counties to enact more-stringent standards. There is also debate over whether the building code should specify what materials builders should use, such as wood, said Nick Zigelbaum, energy policy analyst for the Natural Resources Defense Council.

If the ultimate goal is to help save the environment, he said, the state should prohibit builders from using wood from trees that are harvested in ways that harm the environment, such as timber companies' practice of converting natural forests into industrial plantations.

### **Green standard**

**Reducing energy use** (15 percent goal): Energy Star-certified appliances; elevators and escalators that move only when passengers are present; buildings cooled by roofing materials that reflect sunlight.

**Reducing water use** (20 percent goal): Low-flow toilets; waterless urinals.

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