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San Francisco adopts measure to green existing commercial buildings, save energy, create jobs

San Francisco, CA— The Board of Supervisors today passed ground-breaking green building legislation that will improve energy efficiency in existing buildings, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, lower energy costs, and create green jobs. The ordinance will require owners of existing non-residential buildings to determine how much energy each building consumes, and to make that information public on an annual basis. The ordinance will also require commercial buildings over 10,000 square feet to conduct energy efficiency audits every five years in order to help the building owners and managers optimize building efficiency.

“San Francisco needs to increase the energy and resource efficiency of existing buildings if we are going to meet our aggressive greenhouse gas reduction targets,” said Mayor Edwin Lee. “This ordinance not only helps educate building owners about what they need to do to save energy and money, but it will also boost our local green jobs economy.”

Energy is one of the biggest expenses of building ownership, and will be an even greater financial burden for owners in the future as energy prices escalate. Buildings, which account for about 70 percent of the electricity consumed in the U.S., could be made up to 50 percent more energy efficient with currently available products and services.

The Ordinance codifies the recommendations of the Existing Commercial Building Task Force, which then-Mayor Gavin Newsom convened to identify ways the city could work in concert with the private sector to improve the energy and resource efficiency of existing commercial buildings in San Francisco. The Task Force, similar to the one that developed recommendations for new construction, was comprised of 18 members of San Francisco’s building ownership, developer, financial, architectural, engineering, and construction communities, who the Mayor selected for their knowledge of the building industry and commitment to San Francisco’s long-term sustainability.

“Millions of dollars go wasted every year because buildings aren’t as energy-efficient as they could be,” said Steven Ring, Director of Client Solutions at Cushman and Wakefield, and co-chair of the task force. “By eliminating energy waste, property owners could be enjoying the benefits of that cash and at the same time creating good jobs for energy management professionals and the construction industry.”

Under the Ordinance, building owners would be required to benchmark the energy use of their buildings using a free online tool provided by the US Environmental Protection Agency, the results of which will be filed annually with the city. The next phase of the Ordinance requires building owner to conduct energy audits, starting with commercial properties larger than 50,000 square feet starting in October 2011, and then phase in so that by 2013, the rules would apply to all commercial properties 10,000 square feet or larger.

“San Francisco currently offers energy efficiency audits for businesses through our Energy Watch program, and we have learned that up to 70 percent of business that have an audit will take action and conduct a retrofit,” said Melanie Nutter, Director of San Francisco’s Environment Department. “We expect this Ordinance will deliver similar returns with existing buildings, which could lead to a 50 percent reduction in commercial building energy use within 20 years.”

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