



City of Seattle

Department of Planning and Development
Office of Sustainability and Environment

NEWS RELEASE

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City Program Expands, More Buildings to Improve Energy Efficiency

Seattle, WA – The City of Seattle is sending letters to the owners of 8,000 buildings this week informing them of its new building energy-efficiency program. The program aims to help building owners and managers reduce their energy costs through benchmarking – or measuring and rating a building’s energy performance. By benchmarking, owners get insight into how their building uses – and wastes – energy and can begin identifying opportunities to improve energy efficiency and increase savings.

The City’s Building Energy Benchmarking and Reporting Program is currently underway for nonresidential buildings over 50,000 sq. ft. This next phase will require nonresidential buildings over 10,000 sq. ft. and multifamily buildings with five or more units to benchmark and report their energy performance by April 1, 2012.

The City has developed a series of educational materials – including hands-on training workshops, webinars and a step-by-step “How To” guide – to help owners with benchmarking and provide them information on utility energy-saving programs, rebates and other financial incentives to save energy.

To make the benchmarking process as seamless as possible, the City has partnered with local utilities to provide owners with the building energy consumption data they need in a convenient format. Using the free online tool, ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, owners will be able to easily see their building’s energy performance and how it stacks up against similar buildings. Having this information at their fingertips is the first step towards improving building energy performance and reducing energy costs.

“Buildings consume more than 40% of the energy produced in the U.S. but there is a huge opportunity to lower energy costs through better building efficiency”, said Diane Sugimura, Director of Seattle’s Department of Planning and Development. “The City successfully launched the first phase of the Building Energy Benchmarking program earlier this year and we’re excited to begin reaching an even larger pool of buildings. Helping building owners track their energy use is an important step towards improving building energy efficiency, reducing energy costs, and invigorating the retrofit market to create good local jobs”, she said.

This second group of buildings represents a diverse group of building owners and types including offices, schools, restaurants, retail outlets and more. These properties make up a significant portion of Seattle’s building stock and a great opportunity for increased energy savings.

Many owners and managers already familiar with the benchmarking process see it as a good business practice that helps lower operating costs and boost bottom lines.

“The more information and knowledge you have about your building’s energy performance, the more power you have to control it,” said Lynda Carey, Construction and Asset Manager at Bellwether, an affordable housing organization in Seattle. “For us, benchmarking and making energy-efficiency improvements isn’t just about helping the environment, it is also a good business decision. Our mission is to help families afford more than rent, so the more we can do to lower our energy costs and keep housing affordable, the better.”

The City is working to ensure that all buildings are benchmarked on an annual basis, and that building energy use information is available to potential tenants, buyers and lenders during real estate transactions. That way, building owners, businesses and residents alike can make more informed and cost-conscious decisions when upgrading, buying or renting property.

“The key is education. Once an owner understands how their building is performing and how improving energy efficiency impacts their bottom line and productivity, most jump right in and start making improvements,” said Kevin Dingle, President of Sustaining Structures – a green building consulting company in Seattle.

“Part of managing properties properly is providing as much cash flow to investors as possible. And a big part of that is managing utility costs,” said John Speirs, Senior Vice President at KG Investments – a Seattle-based real estate investment and property management company that regularly benchmarks its properties. “Energy is one of our largest expenses. The lower we can keep our energy costs, the more we can bring to the bottom line, and the better our return on investment. We support the efforts the City is making to expand the use of benchmarking and think it’s a great idea.”

For more information about the program, visit the City’s Energy Benchmarking and Reporting Ordinance website: <http://seattle.gov/dpd/Energybenchmarking> or email: energybenchmarking@seattle.gov.

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