Building Energy Benchmarking Program Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions about the program, compliance requirements, using Portfolio Manager®, and public disclosure of data.

Benchmarking Overview

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What Is Benchmarking?

Benchmarking is tracking energy performance against a standard. Under the Building Energy Benchmarking Program, calculate your energy use intensity by dividing your energy use by the square footage of your building. That number will act as a baseline to compare the efficiency of your building to that of previous years or to those of similar buildings.

What Is the Value of an Energy Benchmark?

Conducting an energy benchmark helps measure the performance of your building and lets you know how efficient or inefficient it may be. A significant portion of a company's operating expenses goes toward energy bills. Energy efficiency improvements may reduce these costs substantially.

What Are the Benefits of Benchmarking?

Benchmarking can help prioritize energy-efficiency investments and track energy efficiency improvements over time.

What Is an ENERGY STAR® Score?

The ENERGY STAR score is a 1 to 100 score that demonstrates the energy efficiency of a building relative to similar buildings across the country. A score of 50 indicates the national average energy performance for that building type. A score of 75 or higher means the building is a top performer and may be eligible for ENERGY STAR certification. Not all building types are eligible for an ENERGY STAR score, and an ENERGY STAR score is not required for compliance with this program.

Building Energy Benchmarking Program Summary

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What Is the Building Energy Benchmarking Program?

The Building Energy Benchmarking Program is the state's program to publicly disclose the energy use of buildings in California.

When Does It Take Effect?

Mandatory reporting began in 2018 for buildings with no residential units and more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area, and in 2019 for buildings with 17 or more residential units and more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. Reporting is due by June 1 annually.

What If My City or County Already Has a Benchmarking Reporting Requirement?

The state regulations allow for buildings reported under a local benchmarking program to be exempted from reporting to the state. Any programs that have received such an exemption will be listed on the California Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking. For buildings in jurisdictions with programs listed on this page, benchmarking and reporting to the local jurisdiction will fulfill compliance with the state program.

Although your building might be exempt from a local reporting requirement, you may still be required to report to the state.

What Is the Procedure to Protect Proprietary Energy Use Data?

When (1) the building owner is the customer of record for the only utility account serving a building, or (2) the building owner is one of two customers of record if the other customer has granted permission to have his or her energy use data shared, the owner may request a trade secret exemption from the executive director of the Energy Commission. If this exemption is granted, the building owner will be required to report building characteristic information but not energy use data.

Where Can I Get More Information?

The Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking.

Compliance Requirements

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Am I Required to Comply?

You are required to comply if your building has (1) more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area and (2) either no residential units or 17+ residential units. These are considered "disclosable" buildings.

What Does Gross Floor Area Include?

The gross floor area includes all square footage within the exterior walls of the building.

What Are the Exemptions to the Reporting Requirement?

You are not required to report to the Energy Commission if:

- Your building is a condominium, as described in Section 4125 or 6542 of the California Civil Code.
- Your building has between 1 and 16 residential utility accounts.
- Your building did not have a certificate of occupancy or temporary certificate of occupancy for more than half of the calendar year for which reporting to the Energy Commission is required.
- Your building is scheduled to be demolished one year or less from the reporting date.
- Your building has more than half of the gross floor area used for scientific experiments requiring a controlled environment or for manufacturing or industrial purposes.
- Your building was benchmarked under a local program listed on the Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking.

I Am the New Owner of a Building. Am I Required to Report Energy Use Data From Before I Owned the Building?

Yes, the owner of the building at the time of the reporting deadline (June 1) is responsible for submitting energy use data. Utilities are required to provide energy use information to a building's current owner regardless of who owned the building during the period for which data is being reported.

How Do Building Owners Determine Building Type?

Building types are defined by how the building is used. For example, a building classified as industrial but used for storage should be identified as storage rather than industrial for reporting purposes.

For additional guidance, building owners can refer to the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager Glossary.

What Is Considered Industrial?

Industrial purposes include manufacturing and assembling goods. Warehouses and distribution centers are not considered industrial and are required to comply.

Do I Need to Comply If My Building Is Mixed-Use With Both Industrial and Office Uses?

If your building has more than 50 percent of the gross floor area used for industrial or manufacturing purposes, you are not required to report.

Otherwise, you should benchmark your building with multiple uses. ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager allows you to assign multiple space use types to a single building.

Is Compliance Required for Distribution Centers?

Yes.

Is Compliance Required for Historic Buildings?

Yes.

Is Compliance Required for Government-Owned Buildings?

Yes. However, buildings owned by the federal government are outside the jurisdiction of this program.

Is Compliance Required for Strip Malls or Open-Air Shopping Centers?

Compliance is required for each building that has more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. Separate buildings that appear to be a single building due to a continuous façade should be treated as individual buildings. If a single building within a strip mall or open-air shopping center encompasses more than 50,000 square feet, then compliance is required for that building.

Does My Building Square Footage Include Parking Areas?

Covered parking structures should be included, while uncovered parking lots should be excluded. When entering your gross floor area into your Portfolio Manager account, there is a separate field for parking, so you can separate the parking area from the building area.

How Do I Comply?

There are five general steps required to comply:

1. Open an account in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

2. Enter each disclosable building into your account.

3. Enter the energy use data for each disclosable building.

4. Click the appropriate reporting link on the Energy Commission's benchmarking page,www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking, which will direct you to log into Portfolio Manager.

5. Submit your report from within Portfolio Manager.

When Do I Need to Comply?

Reporting is due by June 1 annually.

Will I Need to Complete This Each Year?

You will need to resubmit your building each year. After the first year you report, much of the information you are reporting will remain the same. So you will just need to check for information that may have changed, enter the energy use data for the previous calendar year, and submit your report.

What Is the Cost of Complying?

There is no fee to report your data to the Energy Commission, and ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager is a free online tool. However, you may wish to hire a consultant to perform the benchmarking and reporting for you.

Who Can Prepare the Report and Send the Data?

Anyone authorized by the building owner may request energy use data from a utility, benchmark a building, and submit the report to the Energy Commission.

Can You Benchmark My Building?

The Energy Commission cannot benchmark and report your building. You may hire a consultant to complete the process for you.

Do I Need to Load Our Information Into ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager If I Use Different Energy Management Software?

Yes.

What Resources Can Help Me Comply?

The Energy Commission's benchmarking page includes step-by-step guides and videos. You can also contact the Energy Commission's Benchmarking Hotline or (855) 279-6460. For questions about ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

I Received A Letter From A Company That Says I Am Delinquent On My Benchmarking Submission. Did You Send This Letter?

As of April 2020, the CEC has not sent letters regarding benchmarking to building owners. If you receive correspondence and are unsure if it is legitimate, contact the Benchmarking Hotline at Benchmarking@energy.ca.gov or (855) 279-6460. A picture or a scanned copy of the letter may be requested.

If you have a compliance obligation but have not yet submitted your building, submit your data as soon as possible, even if it is after the reporting deadline. If you are unsure whether you have a compliance obligation, contact the Benchmarking Hotline at Benchmarking@energy.ca.gov or (855) 279-6460.

How Do I Know If the Report Has Been Submitted?

After submitting the report, you will receive a confirmation email from ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

What Is the Penalty for Not Complying?

The Energy Commission has the authority to issue fines for noncompliance, after allowing a 30-day period to correct a violation. Building owners who have missed the June 1 reporting deadline are urged to report as soon as possible.

Who Is Responsible for Reporting a Building That Is Jointly Owned?

All owners in a joint ownership are responsible for reporting, but the Energy Commission needs to receive only one report for the building. ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager has the ability to assign multiple owners to a property, which allows all owners to access the property and make needed changes. Joint owners may wish to appoint one owner (for example, the owner of the largest portion of the building) to complete reporting.

What Proof Is Needed to Use the Reporting Link Property Report Without Energy Data?

The Energy Commission does not require proof at this time. However, please keep the notification received from the utility indicating the customers were either not responsive or denied permission.

What If My Building Units Are Not Individually Metered?

Each residential unit is considered a utility account for compliance, whether the unit is directly metered or on a master meter. Any master-metered building that has more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area and has 17 or more residential units is required to comply.

What If My Property Has Multiple Buildings?

The regulations require reporting at the building level when possible. However, multifamily properties that meet all the following should be reported as a single building:

1. Two or more buildings on the same parcel or adjacent parcels

2. At least one energy meter shared between buildings

3. Total gross floor area of more than 50,000 square feet in the buildings that share a meter

4. 17 or more residential utility accounts*

If you wish to track energy use on a more granular level at your multifamily property, you may create a parent property in Portfolio Manager and include individual buildings under it using the campus feature. However, benchmarking results should be reported at the property level to ensure that results capture the energy use of all shared meters and central systems.

*For multifamily properties, each residential unit is considered a utility account for compliance, whether the unit is directly metered or master metered.

Using Portfolio Manager and Requesting Energy Use Data

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Do I need to make any changes to my benchmarking information due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way many buildings in the United States operate. ENERGY STAR assessed the impact of these changes on the 1-100 ENERGY STAR scores and has updated some of their guidance for energy use in commercial buildings. The guidance will allow more opportunities to apply for ENERGY STAR Certification.

Also modified are some ENERGY STAR Certification rules.

See [COVID-19 Related Guidance](#) for Benchmarking and Certification.

What Does Portfolio Manager Allow You To Do?

Portfolio Manager can be used to track and analyze energy and water consumption in your buildings, generate weather-normalized energy use intensity and greenhouse gas emissions metrics, generate a 1 to 100 ENERGY STAR score for many building types, and compare your building to other buildings in your portfolio and to similar buildings nationwide.

What Energy Sources Must Be Reported?

Electricity, natural gas, steam, and fuel oil consumption are required. However, Portfolio Manager also includes fields for propane and other energy sources that you can input and track.

What Fields Are Required?

Basic property details such as address, total gross floor area, occupancy, and year built are required in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, along with 12 months of energy use data. The most important fields to verify are gross floor area and energy use data. If you do not have accurate values for other fields, you can use default or approximate values.

To streamline the process, you can download a [Portfolio Manager data collection worksheet](#)

Is an ENERGY STAR Score Required for Reporting?

No. Not all building types are eligible for an ENERGY STAR score.

Do I Need a Building Identification Number From the Energy Commission to Report My Building?

No. If your utility requests this when you are requesting data, type in N/A, all zeroes, or just leave it blank.

How Do I Report Buildings 50,000 Square Feet or Smaller?

Reporting is not required for buildings with 50,000 square feet or less of gross floor area, except when a meter serves multiple buildings with a total gross floor area greater than 50,000 square feet. In that case, the property should be reported as a single building.

What Should I Do If My Utility Does Not Upload Energy Data to Portfolio Manager?

You can either 1) insert energy totals from your utility bills directly on the website or 2) use the upload template of Portfolio Manager to add data in bulk.

This ENERGY STAR document walks through the three methods of uploading data: How to Get Utility Data into Portfolio Manager - PDF.

Enter data by going to https://www.energystar.gov/buildings/facility-owners-and-managers/existing-buildings/use-portfolio-manager/enter-data-portfolio-manager.

My Bill Cycles Do Not Align With The Beginning And End Of Each Month. Do I Need To Modify My Dates Before Entering Data?

Enter the dates the utility provides without any adjustment. If the data you enter includes the entire required period (typically the previous calendar year), Portfolio Manager will use the data that is needed to benchmark your building.

How Do I Enter Meter Data If My Building Uses or Produces Renewable Energy?

You can track the renewable energy as a separate meter in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

How Do I Benchmark My Building If It Was Recently Occupied and Does Not Have 12 Months of Data?

Your building is exempt from reporting if it did not have a permanent or temporary certificate of occupancy for more than half of the calendar year being reported. Otherwise, reporting is required, so include the energy use data you have.

How Can I Get Whole-Building Data From the Utility?

You will need to provide an attestation that you are the building owner or are authorized to act on behalf of the owner. Proof of ownership is not required.

Is There a Form to Request Data as a Building Owner or Owner's Agent?

No. Utilities have their own processes for requesting energy use data.

Do I Need to Request Data for Retail Tenants Who Pay Their Own Electricity Bills?

Yes, whole-building data is required, including tenant-owned/managed spaces.

What If I Cannot Get Customer Permission to Obtain Energy Use Data?

If there are three or more utility customers in the building, utilities are required to provide whole-building energy use data without requiring customer permission.

I Received Energy Use Data From the Utility That Seems Incorrect. How Can I Verify The Accuracy of the Data I Received?

Begin by verifying that the energy meters used by the utility to calculate your building's energy use are correctly matched to your building. When a utility provides energy use data, they are also required to provide the last four characters of the meter number(s) serving the building. If the meter numbers provided are incorrect for your building, notify the utility of your meter numbers and request corrected data.

If the meter numbers match and you still believe the data is incorrect, and you have utility bills from the requested period, compare the bills to what was provided by the utility. If these do not match, contact the utility for assistance.

What Should I Do If a Utility Has Not Responded To My Request for Energy Use Data by the Deadline?

By the reporting deadline, if you have not received energy use data from your utility or are unable to access your utility account to gather information, submit your building information to the CEC using the link titled "Property Report Without Energy Data." When you receive the data for your building, resubmit the building information using the link "Property Report With Energy Data." The later submittal will replace the earlier one.

I Have Submitted Incorrect Information. Does My Old Submission Need to be Removed Prior to Completing a New Submission?

If the Portfolio Manager ID stays the same (this will be the case if you re-submit the building from the same Portfolio Manager account), your new submission will automatically replace your previous submission.

How Do I Check or Validate Data on ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager?

Portfolio Manager includes a data quality checker. The regulations require the checker to be run before submitting your building to the Energy Commission. Portfolio Manager will also flag certain types of errors automatically. Please review your report before submitting it.

Does the Energy Commission Have Any Recommendations About How To Make the Data Tracking Process Easier?

Your utility may offer recurring automatic upload of energy use data to your Portfolio Manager account so you don't have to request the energy use data annually.

How Do I Report Energy Consumption If I Have Metered Solar Generation Onsite?

In Portfolio Manager, create a meter for solar and fill in the Energy Used On Site and the Energy Exported Offsite sections.

How Do I Report If I Have Solar Generation Onsite but Have Only Estimated Production Data?

In Portfolio Manager, create a meter for solar and fill in the estimated Energy Used On Site and the Energy Exported Offsite sections and indicate that it is an estimate.

How Do I Report If I Have Solar Generation Onsite but There Are No Production or Estimated Production Data?

In Portfolio Manager, create a meter for solar and fill in zero as the estimated Energy Used On Site and the Energy Exported Offsite sections and indicate that it is an estimate.

Public Disclosure

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What Is Being Done With Information From the Program?

The first year of data for each group of disclosable buildings (2018 for buildings with no residential accounts, and 2019 for buildings with 17 or more residential utility accounts) will not be publicly disclosed. Beginning in the second year for each group, the Energy

Commission will disclose selected information for reported buildings on a public website. This will allow current and prospective building owners and tenants to better understand the buildings in which they live and work.

Is the Public Reporting Intended to Shame High Energy Users?

The information will help current and prospective building owners and occupants make better-informed decisions about purchasing, leasing, maintenance, and upgrades.

Are There Penalties for High Energy Use?

No.

What Information Will Be Public?

The Energy Commission may make available:

- Building address, including county, latitude, and longitude.
- Year built.
- Gross floor area and property floor area (buildings and parking).
- Property or building name, if any.
- Open comments field for the building owner or owner's agent to provide additional information about the building.
- ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager property ID.
- Percentage of space occupied (occupancy) and number of occupants.
- Number of buildings (if served by one common energy meter without submetering).
- ENERGY STAR score for eligible buildings.
- Monthly or annual site or source energy use by energy type or a combination.
- Monthly or annual weather-normalized site or source energy use intensity or a combination.
- Monthly or annual peak electricity demand or both.
- Total greenhouse gas emissions.