

What Defines a Building Performance Standard (BPS)?



Building Performance Standards (BPS) are an innovative new policy approach for building efficiency and decarbonization. A BPS is a policy that sets specific deadlines for existing public and private buildings over a certain size to achieve quantified standards of performance across one or more metrics—such as energy use, water use, and/or greenhouse gas emissions. The standards become more ambitious over time, driving continuous, long-term improvement in the building stock. BPS complement traditional building energy code approaches, but work quite differently.

By definition, all BPS share six key elements:

- **All existing large buildings.** BPS apply to all existing public and private buildings of specified sizes and types in a jurisdiction, while building energy codes traditionally apply to new construction, renovation, and equipment replacement activities.
- **Specific deadlines.** BPS set a schedule of specific, date-certain mandatory deadlines, whereas code compliance requirements are generally triggered by the application for a permit.
- **Outcome based.** BPS are outcome-based policies that evaluate compliance based on measured, real world performance (e.g., energy used, greenhouse gas emissions produced). In contrast, building energy codes traditionally evaluate compliance based on prescriptive requirements or on comparing modeled performance to a modeled baseline.
- **Whole building performance.** BPS apply to—and are evaluated for—the whole building, including tenant spaces. Unlike building energy codes, BPS do not specify the performance of any individual elements, giving building owners wide flexibility in how to comply. However, upgrades made to comply with the BPS may themselves trigger the building energy code and be subject to code requirements.
- **Continued improvement.** While building energy codes only apply at the



time of permitting, BPS automatically ratchet up performance targets for each building over time, driving continued improvement in the performance of the existing building stock.

- **Consequences.** BPS impose financial consequences for non-compliance on buildings that don't meet the required performance targets by the deadlines. Building codes condition permits and certificates of occupancy on compliance.

Most BPS policies include three additional elements:

- **Long term certainty.** Most BPS set long-term and interim targets for improved performance outcomes, laying out a pathway that encourages early action while providing the time and regulatory certainty needed for informed investment decisions.
- **Locally tailored.** Most BPS are tailored to the performance and needs of existing buildings within the jurisdiction, with targets that are informed by benchmarking data or other regionally appropriate references, as well as aligned with climate goals and community priorities.
- **Flexible and equitable.** Most BPS provide multiple options for compliance, and often improve equity through additional flexibility or resources for affordable housing and other priority building types. Additionally, BPS can regulate building performance even more holistically by including metrics for water use, indoor air quality, resilience, or other community priorities.

Learn more about these policies and how you can get involved at www.imt.org/bps.

