

What Defines a Building Performance Standard (BPS)?



Building performance standards (BPS) are an innovative policy approach for building efficiency and decarbonization. A BPS is an outcome-based policy that requires, by specific deadlines, existing buildings of specified sizes and types achieve quantified standards of measured building performance across one or more metrics—such as energy use, water use, and/or greenhouse gas emissions. The policies often set long-term and interim targets to provide regulatory certainty and provide multiple compliance pathways to offer flexibility, especially for affordable housing or other priority building types.

BPS complement traditional building energy code approaches, but work quite differently. All BPS policies in North America 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, actual performance (e.g., energy used, greenhouse gas emissions produced), and compare performance outcomes to targets specific to each building type. In contrast, building energy codes traditionally evaluate compliance based on prescriptive requirements or on comparing modeled design 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 apply throughout the building life cycle, and generally require buildings to meet more ambitious performance targets over time, driving continuous, long-term improvement in the existing building stock.
- **Consequences.** BPS impose financial liabilities for non-compliance on buildings that do not either meet the required performance targets by the deadlines or select another approved compliance path.. 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 pathways 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 additional 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.

