



Energy and Environmental Affairs

Home > Grants & Technical Assistance > Guidance & Technical Assistance > Agencies and Divisions > Department of Energy Resources (DOER) >

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Patrick-Murray Administration Announces Federally-Funded “Smart Building” Training Program

Using thermal imaging to measure heat loss and building assessments, program will help Massachusetts builders construct highly energy efficient homes

BOSTON – April 22, 2011 – The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources (DOER) today announced a new federally-funded program, “Smart Building: High Performance Homes,” which will train Massachusetts builders to use thermal imaging-enhanced building assessments to boost the energy efficiency of Massachusetts homes. .

The US Department of Energy (DOE) awarded the Commonwealth \$350,000 to fund activities that improve energy performance of Massachusetts buildings, including the Smart Building training. Massachusetts is among 24 states sharing \$7 million in US Department of Energy’s (DOE) Building Energy Codes program, which, according to the DOE, has dramatically reduced energy use and carbon pollution and saved an estimated \$16 billion for US consumers since its start 20 years ago.

“These training courses will educate a new cohort of building professionals who are knowledgeable about how to maximize energy efficiency and minimize energy costs in communities across the state,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr., whose office includes DOER. “The energy assessments will help business and residents make informed decisions about how to reduce their energy use and associated costs.”

“This is another example of government having a positive impact on everyday life,” said Congressman Mike Capuano. “Through this federal funding, the Commonwealth will promote energy efficiency by working directly with building professionals. The practical impact for Massachusetts families will be more energy efficient homes and workplaces, more energy saved and less spent on heating your home.”

The Smart Building training is designed for building professionals, and covers best practices in residential construction to ensure energy efficiency and lower energy costs in both new homes and major renovations. Aimed at encouraging builders to adopt energy efficient building best practices, the training references the Massachusetts building energy codes, including the Stretch Code, an optional energy efficiency code now adopted in 67 communities - representing more than 2.4 million people, about 39 percent of the state’s population.

First adopted by cities and towns in 2010, the Stretch Code requires approximately 20 percent greater energy efficiency than the existing base energy code in new residential and commercial buildings. The first state-level stretch energy building code in the country, it applies to all residential buildings and new commercial buildings over 5,000 square feet. The International Code Council adopted the core of the Massachusetts commercial stretch code as the basis for the 2012 International Energy Efficiency Code.

The Smart Building training – which is offered at a low cost to builders and is free for municipal building code officials – began earlier this month and continues throughout 2011 across the state. It follows DOER’s successful 2010 building energy code training series, which featured 40 sessions statewide. That program trained approximately

2,000 building professionals, including approximately 1,250 building code officials representing 242 municipalities.

“With buildings comprising over 40 percent of all energy usage in the US, this effort is a terrific way to take a bite out of energy use and its associated costs and will fuel a growing energy efficiency job sector here,” said DOER Commissioner Mark Sylvia.

Training is provided by the Center for Ecological Technology located in Pittsfield and Northampton, and by the Conservation Services Group located in Westborough. More information about the training, including a schedule, is available at www.cetonline.org or training@cetonline.org.

To complement the Smart Building training, DOER will use a portion of the DOE grant to analyze the quality of insulation in buildings using thermal imagery and analysis. By measuring temperature differences between the inside and outside of a building, thermal images can identify places where adding insulation and sealing gaps in construction can reduce heating fuel use and cost. The training will incorporate sample thermal images of building exteriors to illustrate how the quality of installation work impacts the energy performance of a building, and how thermal images can help identify cost-effective energy efficiency improvements. In addition, DOER will use the analysis to compare insulation work in buildings constructed in different time periods.

DOER’s contractor, Sagewell, Inc. of Woburn, will take thermal images of buildings located in a sampling of western and eastern Massachusetts municipalities that have endorsed the program. Imaging took place earlier this year in Belchertown, East Longmeadow, Hampden, Longmeadow, Palmer, Springfield and Wilbraham under a separate DOER pilot project. Imaging also began last week in Hamilton-Wenham and will occur within the next two weeks in Arlington and Lexington. More municipalities may be added.

Residents of participating municipalities who want to “opt out” of the imaging can do so by emailing Sagewell, Inc., at optout@sagewell.com or calling 888-586-1726. Residents can also request that their home be imaged by emailing Sagewell at priority@sagewell.com.

Investments in projects to maximize the energy efficiency of Massachusetts buildings is a critical component of the Patrick-Murray Administration’s Massachusetts Recovery Plan, which combines state, federal and, where possible, private efforts to provide immediate and long-term relief and position the Commonwealth for recovery in the following ways:

- Deliver immediate relief by investing in the road, bridge and rail projects that put people to work today and providing safety net services that sustain people who are especially vulnerable during an economic crisis;
- Build a better tomorrow through education and infrastructure investments that strengthen our economic competitiveness, prepare workers for the jobs of the future, and support clean energy, broadband, and technology projects that cut costs while growing the economy; and
- Reform state government by eliminating the pension and ethics loopholes that discredit the work of government and revitalize the transportation networks that have suffered from decades of neglect and inaction.