

Facts and Myths on the Building Decarbonization Act

Buildings in Rhode Island, specifically accounting for residential and commercial heating, are responsible for nearly 30% of our state's greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, the state is not on track to meet the mandated targets in the Act on Climate, and lacks a plan to reduce emissions from buildings. To meet these mandates, we must tackle the transition of our building sector away from fossil fuels. This requires meaningful investments in energy efficiency in tandem with the electrification of our heating and other fossil fuel appliances.

The Building Decarbonization Act of 2024 (H7617, S2952) is a measured approach to tackling carbon emissions in both existing and new buildings. Pushback to the bill has been shrouded in misinformation, and often conflates the two separate sections of the bill. Rhode Islanders deserve to know the facts. So, let's cut through the noise and bust some myths about the legislation.

MYTH Benchmarking is a burden for building owners.

- This bill would affect large buildings. Gathering the necessary data for benchmarking each year typically requires between 2-8 hours of in-house labor for building owners or managers, and frequently yields opportunities to reduce energy costs.
- MYTH Benchmarking has no benefit to tenants or other building users.
- FACT Having access to data regarding the energy efficiency of commercial and multifamily properties will enable tenants, potential buyers, and investors to make more informed choices regarding where they live and how they spend their money.
- MYTH The Building Decarbonization Act is not "technology-neutral".
 - Benchmarking energy usage and gradual building performance standards enable building owners to analyze their energy use trends and select building improvements at their discretion to increase energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

To the extent that the all-electric new buildings section is not "technology-neutral", this is because electrification is the quickest and easiest way to make an impact on reducing carbon emissions from the building sector, consistent with the mandate of the Act on Climate.

MYTH The Building Decarbonization Act will destroy jobs.

Section 1 of the act, Benchmarking and Building Performance Standards, will spur significant energy efficiency investments by large buildings across the state, facilitating the creation of local employment opportunities.

Section 2 of the act, All-Electric New Buildings, includes provisions for apprenticeship programs and project labor agreements for public projects above a certain threshold.

- MYTH Due to our electricity generation, all-electric buildings won't impact carbon emissions.
- FACT No matter the fuel mix of their grid-generated electricity, 98% of U.S. households would cut their carbon pollution by installing heat pumps today. Heat pumps are long-term, climate-appreciating investments: as the grid gets cleaner, the total emissions impact of heat pumps and any electric appliance will continue to decrease. Further, as these all-electric provisions go into effect, Rhode Island will be closer and closer to its 100% Renewable Energy Standard in 2033.

MYTH All-electric buildings are more expensive to build.

FACT Studies show that all-electric new construction has reached cost parity with fossil fuel infrastructure. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, this is because all-electric homes only need a single heat pump system, eliminating separate, redundant systems for oil or gas.



4. Sealed. "What temperature does a heat pump stop working?". October 6, 2021. https://sealed.com/resources/winter-heat-pump/

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