



ENERGY Reports from the Front



BENCHMARKING

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

A new city law requires that many owners track their buildings' energy and water usage – and post the results for all to see.

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LAST DECEMBER New York City passed [Local Law 84/09](#), part of the new “Energy Conservation Code.” It mandates that large buildings start recording and keeping track of their energy and water use. Building owners must then enter this information into a database that tells where their building’s energy efficiency stands in relation to other buildings’; a benchmark, as it were. “Benchmarking helps building owners learn their own energy use relative to similar buildings,” explains Jason Post, spokesman for Mayor

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Michael Bloomberg's [Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability](#), which administers the program. "Every building is different, and without benchmarking, you can't keep score."

Indeed, according to Evan Mills, a staff scientist at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and a member of the Intergovernmental

Panel on Climate Change team that shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize,

benchmarking is important

in order for co-op and condo boards to make a case for energy-efficient investments, track ongoing projects that are expected to save money and energy, set targets for improvements, and assess a building's performance for potential lenders and apartment buyers, among other things.

In addition, starting no later than September 1, 2011, your benchmark results become part of a public database being developed and maintained by the Department of Finance. The publicly available information will include the United States [Environmental Protection Agency's](#) (EPA) 1 to 100 "energy utilization index" number for your building;

your water use per gross square foot; where available, a rating that compares your building's energy and water use to that of similar buildings; and a comparison of data across calendar years. For the 2010 and 2011 calendar years, however, benchmarking information for covered residential buildings won't be disclosed – presumably to give you time to get your energy-reduction up to speed.



The federal EPA benchmarking tool, administered by the EPA's Energy Star program, goes by the generic-sounding name [Portfolio Manager](#). To learn more, check out the related [FAQ](#) page.

The new law only applies to buildings of over 50,000 square feet (or, technically, two or more on the same tax lot together exceeding 100,000 square feet, or two or more condo buildings governed by the same board and together exceeding 100,000 square feet). It's also important to note that even though the law refers repeatedly to getting information for each "tenant's" energy use, and specifically says the city "may require that [an] owner provide such tenant with a form ... to report such information," a tucked-away phrase in the law says this only applies to commercial tenants, such as a ground-floor retail stores. And water benchmarking is only required if your building has been



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equipped with automatic meter-reading equipment by the [Department of Environmental Protection](#) (DEP) for the full previous year.

Assuming your co-op or condo is 50,000 square feet or more, by May 1, 2011, you must keep a record of energy and water usage, as measured by a benchmarking tool.

The “tool” is simply an internet database system that compiles such water and energy data. In fact, the city even specifies

what benchmarking tool you have to use – the one “developed by the [EPA], and any complementary interface designated by the [city’s] Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability.”

You’ll probably hire a company to measure your energy and water use. While companies around the country have provided benchmarking for commercial and institutional buildings for years now, they’re relatively rare in the New York City area, where such energy-consultancy firms as Manhattan’s [Bright Power](#) and Fresh Meadows’ [U.S. Energy Group](#) are now helping fill the local void.

What such a company does, says Bright Power president

and founder Jeff Perlman, is examine a building’s water use and four components of energy use: electricity, heating oil, natural gas, and municipal steam heat, and then enters it into an online database. They also generally provide you with a detailed analysis for your own use.

When you enter a residential building’s information into the EPA benchmarking tool, “you get a number saying you use this many kilo-BTUs per square foot per year,” says Perlman, which he finds

less useful than the 1 to 100 score that the tool gives to non-residential (commercial, industrial, and institutional) buildings. “The nice thing about the 1 to 100 score is that if you get a 75 that tells you you’re in the 75th percentile [of energy efficiency] of buildings of your type.”

The new city law specifically “mandates the use of the EPA tool,” says sustainability-office spokesperson Post, “because a mayor’s-office review of benchmarking tools has found it to the best.” Moreover, he says, “We have been working with the EPA to customize their tool so it can accurately measure the energy used in the many different building types found in New York City.”

