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Filer:	Erik Jensen
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**California Building Energy
Benchmarking Program
Frequently Asked Questions
(Commercial)
April 18, 2019**

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Background

1. What is benchmarking?

Benchmarking is tracking your performance against a standard. With this program, you will be dividing your energy use by the square footage of your building to calculate your building's energy use intensity. That number will act as a baseline to compare your building's efficiency to previous years or to similar buildings.

2. What is the value to me of an energy benchmark?

Conducting an energy benchmark helps to measure the performance of your building and lets you know how efficient or inefficient it may be. A significant portion of a company's operating expenses goes towards energy bills, so energy efficiency improvements can sometimes reduce these costs substantially.

3. What are the benefits of benchmarking?

Benchmarking can help you prioritize energy-efficiency investments and track energy-efficiency improvements over time.

4. What is an ENERGY STAR score?

The ENERGY STAR score is a 1 to 100 score that demonstrates a building's energy efficiency relative to similar buildings across the country. A score of 50 indicates the national average energy performance for that building type. Not all building types are eligible for an ENERGY STAR score, and an ENERGY STAR score is not required for compliance with this program.

Building Energy Benchmarking Program

1. What is the Building Energy Benchmarking Program?

The Building Energy Benchmarking Program is California's new program to publicly disclose the energy usage of buildings in California.

2. When does the law take effect?

Mandatory reporting began in 2018 for buildings with no residential utility accounts and more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. For buildings with 17 or more residential utility accounts and more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area, reporting is due by June 1 annually, beginning in 2019.

3. What if my city or county already has a benchmarking reporting requirement?

The state regulations allow for buildings reported under a local benchmarking program to be exempted from reporting to the state. Any programs that have received such an exemption will be listed on the Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking. For buildings located in jurisdictions with programs listed on this page, benchmarking and reporting to the local jurisdiction will fulfill compliance with the state program.

Note that although your building might be exempted from a local reporting requirement, you may still be required to report to the state.

4. Is there a procedure to protect proprietary energy use data?

Yes. When (1) the building owner is the customer of record for the only utility account serving a building, or (2) the building owner is one of two customers of record if the other customer has granted permission to have their energy use data shared, the owner may request a trade secret exemption from the executive director of the Energy Commission. If this exemption is granted, the building owner will be required to report building characteristic information but not energy use data.

5. Where can I get more information regarding this program?

The Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking, includes overview information and training materials regarding the program.

6. How can we help spread the word?

We encourage you to participate in webinars designed to foster sector-specific discussions about the Building Energy Benchmarking Program. These webinars serve as a sounding board for overcoming common barriers, sharing best practices, and refining materials about the program.

You are encouraged to promote compliance by sharing materials available through the Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking.

Compliance

1. Am I required to comply?

You are required to comply if your building has (1) more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area and (2) no residential utility accounts. These are referred to as “disclosable” commercial buildings.

2. Are there any exemptions to the reporting requirement?

Yes. You are not required to report to the Energy Commission if:

- Your building is a condominium, as described in section 4125 or 6542 of the California Civil Code.
- Your building has between 1 and 16 residential utility accounts. However, if you have 17 or more residential utility accounts, please refer to the Multifamily FAQ.
- Your building did not have a certificate of occupancy or temporary certificate of occupancy for more than half of the calendar year for which reporting to the Energy Commission is required.
- Your building is scheduled to be demolished one year or less from the reporting date.
- Your building has over half of the total area used for scientific experiments requiring a controlled environment, or for manufacturing or industrial purposes.
- Your building was benchmarked pursuant to a local program listed on the Energy Commission’s benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking.

3. How do building owners determine building type?

Building types are defined by how the building is used for occupancy. For example, if the building is classified as industrial but used for storage, the building should be identified as storage rather than industrial for reporting purposes.

As additional guidance, building owners can refer to the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager Glossary at <https://portfoliomanager.energystar.gov/pm/glossary>.

4. What is considered “industrial”?

Industrial purposes include manufacturing and assembling goods. Warehouses and distribution centers are not considered industrial and are required to comply.

5. Do I need to comply if my building is mixed-use with both industrial and office use?

If your building has over 50% of the square footage used for industrial or manufacturing purposes, you are not required to report.

If not, you should benchmark your building with multiple uses. ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager allows you to assign multiple space use types to a single building.

6. Is compliance required for distribution centers?

Yes.

7. Is compliance required for historic buildings?

Yes.

8. Is compliance required for government-owned buildings?

Yes, however, buildings owned by the federal government are outside the jurisdiction of this program.

9. Is compliance required for strip malls or open-air shopping centers?

Compliance is required for each individual building that has more than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area. Separate buildings that have the appearance of being a single building due to a continuous façade should be treated as individual buildings. If a single building within the strip mall or open-air shopping center encompasses over 50,000 square feet, then that individual building will need to comply.

10. Does my building square footage include parking areas?

Covered parking structures should be included, while uncovered parking lots should be excluded.

When entering your gross floor area into your Portfolio Manager account, there is a separate field for parking so you can separate the parking area from the building area.

11. Can I use ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager to benchmark my building if my building is less than 50,000 square feet?

Yes.

12. How do I comply?

There are five general steps required to comply:

- 1) Open an account in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.
- 2) Enter each disclosable building into your account.
- 3) Enter the energy use data for each disclosable building.
- 4) Click the appropriate reporting link on the Energy Commission's benchmarking page, www.energy.ca.gov/benchmarking, which will direct you to log into Portfolio Manager.
- 5) Submit your report from within Portfolio Manager.

13. By when do I need to complete this?

Reporting is due by June 1 annually, beginning in 2018.

14. Will I need to complete this entire process each year?

After the first year you report, much of the information you are reporting will remain the same, so you will just need to check for information that may have changed, enter the energy use data for the previous calendar year, and submit your report.

15. What is the cost of complying?

There is no fee to report your data to the Energy Commission, and ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager is a free online tool. However, you may wish to hire a consultant to perform the benchmarking and reporting for you.

16. Who can prepare the report and send the data?

Anyone authorized by the building owner may request energy use data from a utility, benchmark a building, and submit the report for that building to the Energy Commission.

17. Can you benchmark my building for me?

No, the Energy Commission cannot benchmark and report your building for you. If you wish to do so, you may hire a consultant to complete the process for you.

18. What if I use different energy management software? Do I need to load our information into ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager as well?

Yes.

19. What resources are available to help me comply?

The Energy Commission's benchmarking page will include step-by-step guides, videos, and frequently asked questions. You can also contact the Energy Commission's Benchmarking Hotline at Benchmarking@energy.ca.gov or (855) 279-6460. For questions and training regarding ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, go to <https://portfoliomanager.zendesk.com/hc/en-us>.

20. How do I know whether I have successfully submitted the report?

After submitting the compliance report through ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, you will receive an email from ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager as a confirmation.

21. Is there any penalty if I do not comply?

The Energy Commission has the authority to issue fines for noncompliance, after allowing a period of 30 days to correct a violation. Building owners who have missed the June 1 reporting deadline are urged to report as soon as possible.

22. If there is joint ownership of a building, who is responsible for reporting?

All owners in a joint ownership are responsible for reporting, but the Energy Commission only needs to receive one report for the building. ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager has the ability to assign multiple owners to a property, which allows all owners to access the property and make changes if necessary. Joint owners of a building may wish to appoint one of the owners (for example, the owner of the largest portion of the building) to complete reporting.

23. What kind of proof is required to use the second reporting link that energy data was not available?

The Energy Commission is not requiring proof at this time. However, people should keep the notification they get from utilities notifying them that the customers either were not responsive or denied permission.

Portfolio Manager and Data Collection

1. What does ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager allow you to do?

Portfolio Manager can be used to track and analyze energy and water consumption in your buildings, generate weather-normalized energy use intensity and greenhouse gas emissions metrics, generate a 1 to 100 ENERGY STAR score for many building types, and compare your building to other buildings in your portfolio and to similar buildings nationwide.

2. What sources of energy are to be reported?

Electricity, natural gas, steam, and fuel oil consumption are required. However, Portfolio Manager also includes fields for propane and other forms of energy that you can input and track.

3. What fields are required in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager for compliance?

Basic property details such as address, total gross floor area, occupancy, and year built are required in ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager, along with 12 months of energy use data. The most important fields to verify are gross floor area and energy use data. If you do not have accurate values for other fields, you can use default or approximate values until you have more accurate values.

To streamline the process of collecting data, you can download a data collection worksheet at <https://portfoliomanager.energystar.gov/pm/dataCollectionWorksheet>.

4. Is an ENERGY STAR score required for reporting?

No. Not all building types are eligible for an ENERGY STAR score.

5. Do I need a building identification number from the Energy Commission to report my building?

No. If your utility requests this when you are requesting data, type in N/A, all zeroes, or just leave it blank.

6. How do I handle a property of individual buildings that are smaller than 50,000 square feet?

Reporting is not required for buildings with less than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area, except when a meter serves multiple buildings with a total gross floor area greater than 50,000 square feet, in which case the property should be reported as a single building.

7. How should I enter energy use data if my utility does not upload data to Portfolio Manager directly?

You can either 1) insert energy totals individually from bills directly on the website or 2) use Portfolio Manager's upload template to add data in bulk.

Here is a link on how to enter data into Portfolio Manager:

<https://www.energystar.gov/buildings/facility-owners-and-managers/existing-buildings/use-portfolio-manager/enter-data-portfolio-manager>.

8. How do you enter meter data when your building consumes or produces renewable energy?

You can track the energy generated from the renewable source as a separate meter on ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager.

9. How do I benchmark if my building was only occupied recently and does not have 12 months of data?

Your building is exempt from reporting if it did not have a permanent or temporary certificate of occupancy for more than half of the calendar year being reported. Otherwise, reporting is required, and you should include as much energy use data as you have.

10. What do I need to provide to get whole-building data from the utility?

You will need to provide an attestation that you are the building owner or are authorized to act on behalf of the building owner. Proof of ownership is not required.

11. Is there a template form for requesting data as a building owner or owner's agent?

No. Utilities have their own processes for requesting energy use data.

12. Would we need to request utility data for the retail tenants who pay their own electricity bill?

Yes, whole-building data is required, including tenant-owned/managed spaces.

13. What if I cannot get customer permission to obtain energy use data?

If there are three or more utility customers in the building, utilities are required to provide whole-building energy use data without requiring customer permission.

14. What should I do if I have requested data from the utility but they have not responded in time for the deadline?

Please complete your submission as soon as you receive energy use data from the utility, even if the compliance deadline has passed.

15. How do I check or validate the data on ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager?

Portfolio Manager includes a [Data Quality Checker](#). The regulations require that you run the Data Quality Checker before submitting your building to the Energy Commission. Portfolio Manager will also flag certain types of errors automatically. Lastly, please review your report before submitting it to the Energy Commission.

16. Does the Energy Commission have any recommendations to make the ongoing data tracking process easier for owners and landlords?

Your utility may offer direct automatic upload of energy use data to your Portfolio Manager account, which will avoid you having to request energy use data annually.

Public Disclosure

1. What will the Energy Commission do with the information that is reported through this program?

The first year of data for each group of disclosable buildings (2018 for buildings with no residential accounts, and 2019 for buildings with 17 or more residential utility accounts) will not be publicly disclosed. Beginning in the second year for each group, the Energy Commission will disclose selected information for reported buildings on a public website. This will allow current and prospective building owners and tenants to gain a better understanding of the buildings in which they live and work.

2. Is the public reporting intended to shame property owners for high energy use?

No. This information will help current and prospective building owners and occupants make better-informed decisions regarding purchasing, leasing, maintenance, and upgrades.

3. Are there penalties for having high energy usage?

No.

4. What building information will be made public?

The Energy Commission may make available:

- Building address, including county, latitude, and longitude
- Year built
- Gross floor area and property floor area (buildings and parking)
- Property or building name, if any
- Open “comments” field for the building owner or owner’s agent to provide additional information about the building
- ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager property ID
- Percentage of space occupied (occupancy) and number of occupants
- Number of buildings (if served by one common energy meter without sub-metering)
- ENERGY STAR score for eligible buildings
- Monthly and/or annual site and/or source energy use by energy type
- Monthly and/or annual weather-normalized site and/or source energy use intensity
- Monthly and/or annual peak electricity demand
- Total greenhouse gas emissions