

BEFORE THE CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

DOCKET 08-HERS-1	
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In the matter of

Preparation of the
*Draft Phase II Home Energy Rating System
Program Regulations*

Docket No. 08-HERS-1

**COMMENTS OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
ON CALIFORNIA HOME ENERGY RATING SYSTEM PROGRAM**

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FOR The County of Los Angeles

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I. INTRODUCTION

The County of Los Angeles, Internal Services Department (“County”) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the proposed update to the California Home Energy Rating System program. The County participated in the May 2, 2008 workshop, and intends to continue coordinating with the California Energy Commission (“CEC”) on building energy performance and rating programs. The CEC is exerting leadership on this issue at an opportune time, as attention turns to how all the sectors of the economy, including the built environment, will contribute to achieving California’s aggressive climate change goals.

The County’s comments are directed in two areas:

1. The County would like to work with the CEC on its strategy to increase the utilization of this program. One avenue this would be a series of workshops hosted by the CEC and other local governments interested in pilot programs.
2. The regulations as proposed create opportunities for customer confusion and should be streamlined, particularly with regard to the actual rating certificate and the number of potential providers for this service.

II. COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES INTEREST IN BUILDING RATING PROGRAMS

In January 2007, the County of Los Angeles adopted an Energy Policy. The Energy Policy is looking comprehensively in four areas: energy and water efficiency; green building operations; environmental stewardship; and public outreach and education. In October 2007, the Board requested a report on the feasibility of instituting an energy performance benchmarking program for all new and existing buildings within the County. (The directive would apply to buildings owned and operated by the County, as well as private buildings in unincorporated areas.)

Staff’s report back to the Board indicates that a County pilot program utilizing HERS for existing residential buildings is feasible and desirable based on the work of the CEC and other, already-established local government residential pilot programs. The County will next work with its provider utilities and other local governments towards the development of a local pilot program to rate energy performance of existing residences. The County would like to coordinate development of a pilot program in conjunction with the CEC and other local governments.

The staff report recognizes that any program LA County might adopt will be more successful if other jurisdictions have very similar, if not the same, standards. The County will work with the 88 cities within its jurisdiction toward this goal. However, a statewide program might be a more effective way to accomplish the objectives of a building rating system.

III. COMMENTS ON THE CEC PROPOSED REGULATIONS

The proposed regulations are generally an improvement over the current program. There are, however, three areas where more work and clarification should occur.

First, as indicated above, the County would like to work with the CEC on the strategy to increase utilization of building rating programs. The County would like to participate in a pilot program for rating homes. The pilot could be ongoing while the permanent regulations are being adopted. Having this “real world” experience could help identify potential roadblocks before they are captured in code, and build wider support among building industry and real estate stakeholders for an energy rating system. The CEC should sponsor workshops for local governments that are interested in participating in pilot programs; the County would be happy to assist the CEC in organizing and running these workshops.

Second, the program as proposed may create confusion for customers. There are three areas in particular where this may occur.

1. The actual rating certificate the customer will receive is quite dense, and uses a counter-intuitive indicator system. Homes are proposed to be rated on a scale of zero to 100, with zero being the best. This recommendation is based on the RESNET system in use today.¹ There is no consideration of the “A-G system” used in the European Union. The E.U. system rates homes with “A” being the best and “G” being the worst. This is a more intuitive approach for most consumers. Even having 100 be the best is easier to understand. At the May 2, 2008 workshop, staff and consultants reported that the use of zero as the best reflects the interest in promoting zero net energy and/or lower greenhouse gas emissions. While this is a noble goal, it will be frustrated if customers do not understand the rating scale and therefore do not respect the system, particularly if it continues to be voluntary.

¹ CEC-400-2008-013-D, *HERS Topic Report: Consultant Report*, May 2008, pp. 54, 57.

2. The proposed regulations envision a plethora of different entities that can perform some or all of the building rating evaluation and subsequent upgrade work. In many instances, these functions overlap and/or have similar titles. Customers may be able to have all the work performed by one contractor, or they may need to hire several individuals or firms to obtain the building rating. This is going to create barriers to participation, particularly if the program continues to be voluntary. Most people purchase or rent a home infrequently. They do not want to shop around to have their home rated for energy efficiency and/or greenhouse gas emissions, particularly when they are not conversant with the subject matter. Having a number of different categories of providers is only going to create additional confusion on the part of customers, and deter them from participating because they are not sure whether the vendor with whom they are talking will provide the full range of services needed. The CEC should significantly simplify the categories of vendors.
3. Similarly, the CEC must ensure that this relatively new category of service providers (even after the number of positions is simplified) is launched credibly. The CEC should determine whether there will be any professional board oversight to ensure that customers are getting certified ratings, and have recourse in the event of problems. The CEC also should be coordinating with the state's higher education systems, including the community college system, to develop accredited programs for this new workforce.

IV. CONCLUSION

The County supports the CEC's efforts to update the HERS program. The County will work with the CEC on pilot projects. The CEC should be mindful of making the program too complicated, and should revisit the proposed energy performance certificate, the number of market players, and other operational features that could render the program difficult for customers to understand and expensive to participate in.