

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE



The Montana Department of Labor and Industry's (MDLI) proposed updates to the state building code include a number of positive changes to the building codes, including incorporating the 2021 International Energy Conservation Code and allowing local jurisdictions to implement certain "stretch codes," in addition to the base code.

For example, MDLI's proposed rules allow certified jurisdictions to adopt solar-ready residential codes (meaning new construction electrical systems and roofs must be ready to accommodate solar), solar-ready commercial zones, and zero-energy commercial code provisions (requiring new commercial buildings to offset energy consumption with renewable energy). These stretch codes would allow ambitious communities to use local government powers to accelerate the clean energy transition.

However, the proposed amendments do not allow stretch codes for residential buildings. Given that residential buildings are the most common and use the most aggregate energy, we feel that this is a massive oversight.

If you agree, email buildingcodes@mt.gov to submit a comment. The deadline for comments is May 13.

BENEFITS OF UPDATED CODES:

Cost and savings.

Montanans' monthly electricity and gas bills are based on their use of electricity and gas. The 2021 Code requires high-efficiency lighting sources, which require less energy and can lower utility bills. Since lighting represents 20% of a home's energy expenses, more efficient lighting allows residents to save money on electricity.

Avoiding costly retrofits.

Retrofitting a building's existing lighting, HVAC system, or plumbing is expensive and time-consuming. However, if a building is designed following energy-efficient codes, homeowners may be able to avoid costly retrofits altogether.

Affordability and equity.

30% of Montanans rent their homes and have little input on improvements to their rented spaces. Buildings that are built to higher energy efficiency standards lock in savings for everyone. The 2021 Code increases the thermal resistance of insulation, which will retain more heat in the winter and lower costly heating bills.

Health and safety.

Buildings must be designed so owners can easily switch to electricity. Gas burned in furnaces, water heaters, and for cooking emits dangerous pollutants. Electrification of our energy supply is better for public health.

Jobs and prosperity.

Designing and building energy-efficient buildings can create jobs throughout Montana. Adopting new building codes keeps the construction workforce competitive when it comes to the latest design strategies and technology applications in the building sector.