

The Real Green Building Challenge - Creating Policy That Works

[Sarah Kuck](#), 29 Jul 09

[Green buildings](#) are great, but the time for heralding each one as a symbol of sweeping change is over. To get our greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption under control, it's time to make green building the norm.

One way to fast-track this change is to create compelling policy. Governments across the globe are working to craft policy solutions that will rein in greenhouse gas emissions from the housing sector. One of the most well known is the United Kingdom's 10 year plan to take new buildings from non-regulated to carbon neutral. "[Toward Carbon Neutral Development](#)" provides for a gradual tightening of energy efficiency building regulations -- lowering acceptable carbon emissions by 25 percent in 2010, by 44 percent in 2013, and down to the zero carbon target by 2016.



It's important to pair standards, which raise the baseline, with policies that act as incentives, motivating people to strive for continuous improvement. One example that helps bring existing buildings up to speed, is a new rule in England and Wales that mandates that all properties sold or rented are required to have an energy efficiency check up. A qualified Domestic Energy Assessor tests the efficiency of the building based on size, age, layout and insulation. Afterward, each building owner receives an energy performance certificate, which must be shown to prospective buyers or tenants.

Other countries are now looking to follow suit. This spring, the European Union announced that it hopes to pass [rules similar to the UK's](#), by the end of 2009 to make carbon-neutral buildings the norm by 2019. And across the pond, leaders in Ontario, Canada, recently passed the [Green Energy Act](#), which places into law rules that will slowly ratchet up the energy performance requirements for basic Code Compliant buildings, effectively helping to lower the province's total emissions.

Policy is a powerful thing. Using it to put today's best building practices into place can help cut total emissions of carbon dioxide quickly, [create new jobs](#) and save home owners money that otherwise seeps through the cracks. Treating each green building as a special flower is getting us nowhere. Let's stop creating one-offs and start creating massive change through policy that's meaningful.

Image: UK Government Poster Campaign, October 2008.