



FUTURE OF GAS DOCKET

In August, the Future of Gas Stakeholder Committee continued their discussion on the transition away from natural gas in RI.

Read more on page 3.

EC4 UPDATE

The EC4 Advisory Board met in July and August, and held an EC4 STAB meeting in September.

Read more on page 4.

EQUITY WORKING GROUP

The Energy Efficiency EWG convened in August where URI Cooperative Extension presented and the 2024 EWG Report was discussed.

Read more on page 5.

IN THIS ISSUE

Spotlight

Biden-Harris Administration Announces over \$240 Million for New and Innovative Building Codes to Save Consumers Money, Reduce Impacts of Climate Change 2

Research highlights

University of Maryland Researchers Are Playing a Major Role in the Future of Climate-Friendly Air Conditioning 2

Policy and regulatory updates

Governor McKee Signs Solar Protections Bill 3

Technology and Innovation

Expansion of Public-School Lighting Accelerator Program to All Rhode Island Schools 4

Massachusetts Cities and Towns Embrace Optional Emissions-reducing Building Codes 5

UPCOMING EVENTS

GECA Heat Pumps 101 Webinar - 9/26

NEEP Ready Set Scale Webinar - 9/26

DOE Justice Week 2024 - 10/22 to 10/24

URI Plugged Into Energy Lecture Series - 10/29, 11/19

RIBA Rhode Island Home Show - 4/10 to 4/13

MEETINGS COVERED

EC4 Advisory Board - 7/31 and 8/28

Equity Working Group - 8/22

Future of Gas Stakeholder Committee - 8/27

EC4 STAB - 9/3

BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES OVER \$240 MILLION FOR NEW AND INNOVATIVE BUILDING CODES TO SAVE CONSUMERS MONEY, REDUCE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

On August 27th the Biden-Harris administration announced that 19 state and local governments will receive over \$240 million to adopt and implement the latest energy efficient building codes. As part of the administration's Investing in America Agenda, these funds will be distributed across the nation and invested into 19 high priority projects.

Energy efficient and innovative building code development is crucial as it can save building operators money on their utilities, increase resilience of the electric grid and save lives during climate-fueled extreme weather and

extensive power outages.

In addition to the financial assistance, the 19 selected projects will also receive technical assistance to support the transition and implementation of traditional energy codes, zero energy codes, and building performance standards.

Some of the projects selected to receive funding are Cincinnati, Ohio, Kansas City, Missouri, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Colorado, Hawaii, Boston and Cambridge Massachusetts, New York City New York. To read more about the projects, visit the [selection summary page](#).

University of Maryland Researchers Are Playing a Major Role in the Future of Climate-Friendly Air Conditioning - Inside Climate News

University of Maryland's Center for Environmental Energy Engineering (CEEE) have been seeking a solution to make air conditioning units more efficient and environmentally friendly as dependence on AC units continuously increases due to increased extreme temperatures. Air conditioners utilized hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) as a cooling agent for decades, but in recent years HFCs have begun to be phased out as they are a potent greenhouse gas with high global warming potential.

Elastocaloric cooling is an alternative cooling method which emerged from the parenthood of Dr. Reinhard Radermacher and Dr. Ichiro Takeuchi. Dr. Takeuchi found that nickel titanium wires create a cooling effect by stretching and releasing. Overtime through their partnership and CEEE's cooling expertise and passion toward environmentally responsible energy conversion, elastocaloric cooling was developed. This method of cooling applies mechanical stress to superplastic shape memory alloy such as nickel titanium alloys. As tension is applied, the metal releases a large amount of heat, and as tension is released the heat is absorbed. This motion creates a cooling effect. Although the cooling effect is not as strong as HFCs, it is an admirable alternative. As metals are more stable than gas and nickel and titanium are naturally occurring, they are less harmful to the environment.

The Department of Energy (DOE) is also attributed to the CEEE's success. Last fall the center received \$5 million of funding toward 3 different projects. Dr. Radermacher and Dr. Takeuchi's technology findings have gained worldwide attention, creating a healthy competition between various labs. The ultimate goal of the CEEE is to develop a cooling system that does not release any output into the atmosphere, but a short-term goal is to develop a system that has significant cooling capacity and is also affordable.

UPDATES FROM Future of Gas Docket



EEC
NEWSLETTER

**RHODE
ISLAND**
SEPTEMBER 2024

The Future of Gas Stakeholder Committee convened on August 27th. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the outline of the Future of Gas Stakeholder Committee Report provided by facilitator Apex Analytics. Multiple stakeholders expressed some frustration that they were not able to provide comments on a full draft Report at this point in the development process. The first section of the report is an overview of the current gas system and regulation process in Rhode Island. Stakeholders discussed the level of technicality that would be included, and they decided that this section should be both thorough and accessible as it will provide context for readers who are unfamiliar with the gas system.

The second section focuses on policy requirements for the Act on Climate and how it influences goals for the gas system. One stakeholder said that the report must explicitly describe the authority of the PUC so that readers do not have questions about their regulatory abilities in the future as the gas system transitions. Some Committee members suggested describing the difference between gross emissions goals and net-zero requirements, different strategies to regulate carbon emissions, and specific arguments supporting that the chosen strategies are more effective than others.

Next, the Committee discussed the recommendation for the PUC to undergo a process to set formal targets for the gas system and create a path to compliance with the Act on Climate. The Committee clarified that the targets will not be replacing the economy-wide targets laid out in the Act on Climate, but specifically defining benchmarks for the gas system in alignment with the targets. A few stakeholders suggested that the report specifically address how progress towards each target will be measured and enforced. Citing concerns about the State's ability to meet its interim Act on Climate mandates, members of the Committee recommended that the PUC act quickly to establish next steps following the completion of the report.

The Stakeholder Committee moved to the section of the report explaining the pros and cons of each strategy for gas system decommissioning. Several stakeholders reiterated the need for urgency in this process and were disappointed that the outline did not include specific recommendations for review. The committee suggested that each recommendation should include a description of stakeholder feedback and whether the authors of the Report agreed or disagreed with it. Some stakeholders felt that the economic signals in the strategies were more stick than carrot, and they encouraged the PUC to consider incentives to lower energy consumption and emissions additionally.

The Committee then considered existing strategies that can support goals to reduce natural gas usage in the near term. There was discussion about switching customers onto delivered fuels, and if the benefit of removing them from the gas system outweighed the cost of delivered

fuel emissions. The committee had split opinions. Some stakeholders commented that switching to delivered fuels is always bad, but others thought that it could be useful as temporary exceptions to avoid reinvestment into the gas system. Stakeholders were also mixed on the reality of this concern; many felt that heat pumps would always be the more popular choice in part because they provide both heating and cooling.

Finally, the Stakeholder Committee discussed the mitigation mechanisms section. One stakeholder noted that in Massachusetts, the Clean Heat Standard (CHS) includes a Justice40 component to prevent energy burden increases among low- to moderate- income customers. Others added that the CHS should prioritize inefficient gas technology instead of all gas heat. Another stakeholder mentioned that in hybrid solutions, the backup rate sends a price signal to encourage heat pump use. The Committee flagged the implications of additional supporting policies for review by the EC4.

As a next step, the Stakeholder Committee will submit formal written comments on the Report outline by the end of September.

GOVERNOR MCKEE SIGNS SOLAR PROTECTIONS BILL | GOVERNOR'S OFFICE, STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

On August 7th a new solar protections legislation was signed by Governor Dan McKee alongside bill sponsors Representative Ackerman and Senator Jacob Bissaillon in Cranston, Rhode Island. As the solar industry grows more popular, customer complaints and questionable sales practices were being brought to attention. The new law prioritizes the safety of homeowners during door-to-door solar panel sales pitches and ensures families are delivered the solar outcomes they are pitched.

This law now requires Rhode Island solar retailers to register their business and a list of all representatives soliciting sales, conduct criminal records checks for all sales representatives, and follow municipal restrictions on door-to-door sales and federal telemarketing rules. Additionally, this law gives allows the Department of Business Regulation the authority to investigate complaints and impose any administrative penalties.

The Rhode Island Energy Efficiency Council (EEC) is a group of stakeholders that serves all customers to ensure the utility is investing in the least expensive resource - energy efficiency. Learn more at <https://eec.ri.gov/>



The Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4) Advisory Board met on July 31st. The board discussed the potential of collaborating with the EC4 Science and Technical Advisory Board (STAB). The goal of the collaboration is to provide technical expertise for the board to fulfill the duties of technical review of draft plans. STAB is in the process of hiring a consultant through a Request for Proposal (RFP) Process. The consultant will meet regularly with the board to directly review materials and weigh in with additional thoughts. The board discussed funding ideas, including engagement with frontline communities, community engagement at grassroots and municipal levels, technical support to municipalities for decarbonization strategies, microgrids, and resiliency hubs.

Elizabeth Stone from the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) provided updates on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG). The New England Heat Pump Accelerator Coalition, led by Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, will receive a \$450 million CPRG to implement community-driven solutions that accelerate the clean energy transition, address the climate crisis, decrease air pollution, and advance environmental justice efforts. Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources, part of the New England Heat Pump Accelerator Coalition, was selected by the EPA to receive an estimated \$30-40 million to support training for installers and heat pump installations. Additionally, Stone informed the board that the [2021 Rhode Island Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#) was published. Stone explained that the pandemic impacted the 2020 numbers. The 2021 Greenhouse Gas Inventory demonstrates a rebound from Covid with increased transportation and residential heating. Despite these increases, Rhode Island met the target of 10% below 1990 emissions levels.

The EC4 Advisory Board met on August 28th. The board discussed 2025 legislative plans. The Acadia Center reported that the [building decarbonization act](#) did not pass, but the EC4 will study benchmarking in building emissions reductions. The Acadia Center is also working to adjust the energy efficiency statute to allow for heat pumps. The EC4 gave an update on the 2025 Climate Action Strategy and announced that the OER is the final stages of selecting a vendor. The Advisory Board discussed ongoing state planning projects, including RI Complete Streets Plan, RI Safe Streets for all, the Metro Connector Alternatives Analysis, the Rail Passenger Survey, the East Providence Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Project, the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the Solid Waste Management Plan, and the Resilient Rhody and Coastal Resilience Plan. Advisory Board members suggested outreach to individual municipalities to see if there are town resilience plans that should be integrated with statewide efforts. The Board emphasized that municipalities would need support to ensure that the state meets the goals of the Act on Climate.

The Advisory Board discussed 2025 EC4 Funding, specifically a [proposal from the Advisory Board](#) to improve public access to understanding of scientific and technical

language, communicate environmental implications, create additional forums for state groups involvement in climate strategy in collaboration with the EC4, identify gaps in community outreach, and add support for municipalities. The Advisory Board stressed that two-way communication between the EC4 and municipalities is essential for fulfilling its role. DEM stated that there is \$100,000 available for the Advisory Board or the Science and Technical Advisory Board (STAB) to supplement their efforts. RIDEM suggested that the Advisory Board could use these funds to engage with a public relations firm and carry out a small branding initiative.

An EC4 STAB meeting occurred on September 3rd. The EC4 shared that Rhode Island was not selected for the Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (EPA CPRG). Although not accepted, RI's grant application was well scored and received valuable feedback. There are no other grant opportunities planned for the near future.

Additionally, the EC4's budget was made public during the last week of August. The EC4 was accepting comments on the budget through September 12th. The STAB was in a closed executive session for the remainder of the meeting.

GOVERNOR MCKEE, OFFICE OF ENERGY RESOURCES ANNOUNCE EXPANSION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL LIGHTING ACCELERATOR PROGRAM TO ALL RHODE ISLAND SCHOOLS

Rhode Island Governor Dan McKee, alongside the Rhode Island Office of Energy Resources (OER) announced in May the Public School Lighting Accelerator Program has expanded to all municipalities in Rhode Island. Initially focused on ten communities, the program now includes 26 additional public school districts. For the new districts, the expanded program will cover 75% of lighting upgrade costs or up to \$300,000, while schools in designated environmental justice communities will continue to receive full funding covering total cost.

The initiative, part of OER's Lead by Example program, aims to improve learning environments and reduce energy costs by transitioning schools to energy efficient LED lighting. This effort also supports Rhode Island's Act on Climate goals, targeting net-zero emissions by 2050. As of May, 18 projects have been completed, with 15 more underway.

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RHODE ISLAND ENERGY EFFICIENCY EQUITY WORKING GROUP



EEC
NEWSLETTER

RHODE ISLAND
SEPTEMBER 2024

The Energy Efficiency Equity Working Group (EWG) convened on August 22nd. The meeting began with a member spotlight on Kate Venturini Hardesty of the URI Cooperative Extension. Hardesty spoke about how the Cooperative Extension and the EEC are collaborating to uncover best practices for engaging underrepresented audiences so that they can take advantage of energy efficiency programs. Hardesty also described the Health Equity Zone (HEZ) events that began this summer, the Energy Fellows program, and URI's Plugged into Energy Lecture Series. EWG members gave positive feedback on the Cooperative Extension's efforts.

The EWG reviewed the 2024 EWG Report and recommendations. Rhode Island Energy said they tried to infuse all past and current recommendations from the EWG into the 2025 Equity Plan. EWG members were concerned that some items were rolled over from the previous year with no indications of improvement. Several EWG members suggested making recommendations and takeaways the focus of the Report rather than meeting summaries.

Green & Healthy Homes Initiative listed several improvements to next year's EWG, including developing a formal charter, recreating new members, and a dedicated section for EWG materials on the RIE website. An EWG member suggested a future topic: Tracking health metrics related to energy efficiency and weatherization. The EWG will convene again in October.

MASSACHUSETTS CITIES ARE QUICKLY EMBRACING NEW EMISSION-SLASHING BUILDING CODE OPTION

In 2022, Massachusetts introduced a new, optional building code called the specialized stretch code with the goals of lowering fossil fuel emissions and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Since the code became law in 2023, 45 municipalities representing roughly 30% of the state's population have voted to adopt it into their building guidelines. Climate activists were strongly encouraged by the quick uptake among Massachusetts cities and towns.

Massachusetts has used opt-in building codes to advance decarbonization before. In 2009, the state

introduced its first stretch code which included stricter energy efficiency requirements. As of this year, only 8.5% of the population lives in a town or city that has not adopted a stretch code.

The 2023 specialized stretch code takes decarbonization goals even further; the code was designed with 2050 and intermediate emissions reductions targets in mind. Elizabeth Mahony, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources said, "We want to work towards decarbonizing those buildings, right from the start, as we look to a future in 2050 while we are net-zero in greenhouse gas emissions."

While the stretch code does not require immediate net-zero emissions in new buildings, it aims to prepare all new buildings for the transition to carbon neutrality before 2050. Newly built single-family homes can still utilize fossil-fuels for space heating, water heating, cooking, and drying, but they must adhere to higher energy efficiency standards and be wired to allow for full electrification in the future. All new single-family homes must have the infrastructure for at least one electric vehicle charger. New multifamily buildings are required to follow Passive House standards, which requires a significant reduction of energy consumption compared to similar, existing buildings.

Decarbonization advocates have embraced and praised the new building codes, but the construction industry has some concerns. Industry officials have found that the equipment necessary to achieve the higher levels of energy efficiency is more expensive than legislators anticipated. Additionally, they worry that the high cost of electricity in Massachusetts will pose financial challenges for new homeowners in all-electric homes. Finally, builders must now navigate three different building codes as well as the new rules of a fossil fuel ban pilot program in ten communities, increasing confusion in an already complex industry.

Cambridge Assistant Commissioner of Inspectional Services, Jacob Lazzara, reported that Cambridge experienced some initial confusion, but time and communication from the city allowed for a smoother transition. Cambridge will deliver trainings and materials to inform builders, architects, and other professionals about construction processes under the new specialized stretch code.

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