

2012 INTERNATIONAL GREEN CONSTRUCTION CODE

ADOPTION TOOLKIT

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Apartment properties face new challenges as federal, state and local governments implement sustainability initiatives and seek to incorporate green building mandates into building codes. The National Multi Housing Council and the National Apartment Association (NMHC/NAA) support cost-effective and technologically feasible improvements to building environmental performance. However, changes to code and standard requirements must address the specific needs of residential occupancies, including the continued affordability and availability of new apartment homes.

Many states and hundreds of individual localities have adopted green building measures, ranging from incentive programs to mandatory building standards. These jurisdictional initiatives generally utilize non-standardized, green building metrics developed by various private-sector organizations. To address the growing need for uniform green building criteria, however, the International Code Council (ICC) developed the International Green Construction Code (IgCC), the first model code for green buildings, including multifamily properties.

This document is designed to assist code officials and apartment industry representatives as jurisdictions consider adoption of green building guidelines – particularly the 2012 IgCC. While the ICC codes serve as the basis for most state and local building codes, they are not in effect or enforceable until adopted by a state or local jurisdiction. Accordingly, state and local governments may adopt the IgCC in whole, in part or amend the model provisions to accommodate specific regional conditions. Therefore, this guidance includes specific recommendations for the adoption of the 2012 IgCC to accommodate the unique characteristics of multifamily properties.

Key Considerations for Adoption of Green Initiatives and the 2012 IgCC:

- 1) Support Voluntary Adoption of the National Green Building Standard (NGBS).** NMHC/NAA support green building and the voluntary use of the NGBS. The NGBS provides robust green building criteria specifically tailored to the residential sector. For apartment properties, it is the best tool available for use as a voluntary green building compliance metric used in conjunction with tax benefits, loans, grants and other incentive programs. The NGBS is an important program for the multifamily sector, as it is the only green building standard addressing all residential properties and developed with input from the apartment industry.
- 2) Support Reference to the NGBS in All Green Building Codes and Standards.** NMHC/NAA members should be aware of any actions to adopt the IgCC in their jurisdictions and support a full multifamily exemption. Policymakers must understand that any form of green building mandates will create new costs and design considerations that could undermine the affordability and availability of new and renovated housing. Where a jurisdiction elects to extend the IgCC to multifamily properties, it is important that the alternative compliance option allowing apartment firms to follow the NGBS is maintained in the adopted version.
- 3) Monitor ASHRAE Standard 189.1.** Members should also be mindful of attempts to adopt ASHRAE Standard 189.1 in their jurisdictions. ASHRAE 189.1 can be adopted as a standalone document or as a compliance option under the IgCC. Apartment firms and industry advocates communicating with policymakers should reinforce the message that the NGBS is a residential-focused green standard and is therefore the most appropriate green building metric for all multifamily construction.

The 2012 IgCC

Published in March 2012, the IgCC is designed to be compatible with the widely adopted ICC family of codes and standards. The IgCC provides comprehensive requirements for the environmental design and performance of buildings, including land development, material selection, energy and water efficiency, and indoor air quality. Of concern, although the IgCC was originally envisioned as an introductory green building code, the final IgCC includes aggressive design and construction requirements that could prove costly and technically challenging for apartment properties.

In addition, the IgCC's structure significantly deviates from that of the prevalent green building programs currently being used. Green building programs typically follow a point-based system that allows builders to select from an array of green building practices to meet individual project needs. Instead, the IgCC requires local code officials to identify the mandatory compliance provisions at the time of code adoption. In addition to restricting the code's flexibility, this unusual level of customization means that firms operating in multiple regions may face significantly different compliance requirements between jurisdictions.

The IgCC may also be particularly challenging for multifamily construction, as residential buildings were originally excluded from the code's scope. Since uncertainty about the code's reach into the residential sector continued throughout the development process, the IgCC was formed without sufficient input from the apartment industry.

While the IgCC as published clarifies the code's residential scope, it provides for significantly different treatment of low- and high-rise apartment buildings. High-rise multifamily buildings (five or more stories in height) are automatically included within the scope of the IgCC, while low-rise multifamily buildings are exempt from the baseline code. Instead, the code leaves the treatment of low-rise residential buildings to the discretion of individual localities. The IgCC offers jurisdictions the option of extending the code to all residential construction during the adoption process.

Of importance to apartment firms, multifamily buildings may comply with the IgCC using the NGBS – the only green building standard specifically designed for all residential properties, including low- and high-rise apartments, mixed-use and renovations.

National Green Building Standard – ICC 700

The NGBS provides apartment firms with uniform guidance on green building practices and was designed as an alternative to non-standardized green rating systems, such as the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program. Developed with significant input from multifamily stakeholders, the NGBS addresses the diversity of multifamily construction types and does not differentiate between low- and high-rise properties.

Compliance with the NGBS is based on a combination of mandatory elements and a point-based system. Points are allotted for green building practices in six different areas: site development; water conservation; material resource efficiency; energy efficiency; indoor air quality; and operations and maintenance. While a threshold number of points must be earned in each category, users are free to select the practices that are most meaningful and cost-effective for their projects.

Revision of the 2008 edition of the NGBS began in November 2010 and is now in its final stages. Publication of the updated NGBS is expected in late 2012 or early 2013.

ASHRAE Standard 189.1

ASHRAE Standard 189.1, Standard for the Design of High-Performance Green Buildings Except Low-Rise Residential Buildings, provides another IgCC compliance pathway for multifamily buildings above four stories in height. Similar to the IgCC, ASHRAE Standard 189.1 represents a significant departure from other green building programs and standards, such as the NGBS, because it does not allow users the flexibility of selecting from a menu of sustainable practices. Instead, all of Standard 189.1's provisions are mandatory and regulate a broad spectrum of building practices, including energy and water efficiency, site sustainability, indoor air quality, materials and resource conservation, and building operations.

While new and substantially renovated multifamily properties over three stories are included in the scope of this standard, the document is largely designed for commercial buildings. As such, the standard requires the use of products and technologies not fully vetted for use in the multifamily sector.