

2014: The year of climate action

by Trisha Miller, senior adviser, HUD, Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities

As President Obama has said, “climate change is a fact.” And he is right. Climate change should not be an issue that we leave to the next generation, -- we have to start taking action now.

We at HUD share the President’s vision, because creating safe, sustainable and resilient communities is part of our mandate. Extreme weather events and climate change jeopardize our mission, and we are taking action to invest in energy efficiency and expand clean energy to power the residential sector. We know that these cumulative efforts are making a difference in addressing climate change and will strengthen affordable housing assets, reduce carbon emissions, and prepare our communities for tomorrow. President Obama recently issued a new goal for America: cut energy waste in half within our homes and businesses over the next 20 years. To help achieve that goal, we have partnered with the Department of Energy (DOE) on an expansion of the Better Buildings Challenge to reach multifamily housing. Leading multifamily building owners and managers across the country have joined the challenge as Partners, making public commitments to energy efficiency. These Partners receive national recognition and are able to take advantage of federal technical assistance and policy incentives to develop new approaches to cut energy waste across their portfolios.

The Better Buildings Challenge is a voluntary leadership initiative that recognizes owners and managers of market rate multifamily housing, public housing, Low-Income Housing Tax Credit properties, and/or HUD-assisted multifamily properties dedicated to promoting energy efficiency.

To join the Challenge, multifamily building owners and managers make a public commitment to

1. Conduct an energy efficiency assessment of their building portfolio and pledge an organization-wide energy savings goal of at least 20% within 10 years;
2. Take action by showcasing energy efficiency projects and implementation models; and
3. Report results by sharing whole-building energy performance data that demonstrates success.

Today, the Better Buildings Challenge represents nearly 400 million square feet and about 370 thousand units of multifamily residential property. These owners have partnered with the federal government to recognize the role that increased energy efficiency can play in reducing carbon pollution, fostering healthy communities, and improving the financial stability of housing assets. DOE and HUD work with Partners to leverage, develop, and share innovative approaches to energy efficiency.



As indicated in the President’s Climate Action Plan, HUD is also advancing a new Federal Renewable Energy Target – 100 megawatts of onsite renewable energy by 2020 – to bring renewable energy into low-income housing. Last year, for the first time in more than 15 years, the U.S. installed more solar capacity than any other nation in the world. We must capitalize on this momentum and ensure that all communities – especially those hardest hit economically – reap the benefits of clean energy production.

Achieving this target will require tripling onsite renewable energy at federally assisted housing developments. HUD is collaborating with national leaders to help reach this goal through solar deployment. One recent example is from HUD’s Better Buildings Challenge Partner, the National Housing Trust (NHT). Last month, HUD Secretary Julián Castro participated in the grand opening of NHT Renewable at the St. Dennis Apartments in Washington, D.C. NHT has created a new financing model for installing solar systems across multifamily property portfolios that can be replicated in the affordable housing market.

Secretary Castro has made addressing climate change one of his top priorities, and we continue to advance clean energy solutions with partners such as GRID Alternatives, the largest solar non-profit in the nation. Secretary Castro recently joined GRID Alternatives and Habitat for Humanity to complete new solar installations on Habitat homes and support job training. As the Secretary noted, America generates more renewable energy than ever before, with tens of thousands of American jobs to show for it, and we must seize the moment to continue to promote jobs and ensure that low-income residents benefit from the growing renewable energy market.