



Key Points

- *Climate change is real, and federal legislation is needed to address it.*
- *Buildings are the indirect sources of over 40% of the carbon dioxide emissions in the United States – principally through their consumption of energy.*
- *Any climate change legislation put into law should include requirements that involve reductions in GHG emission contributions made by buildings.*

DESIGNING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Help Make Buildings Carbon Neutral

AIA Position

The built environment is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) generated in the United States. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) believes that the threat of climate change is real and that government at all levels should adopt policies to reduce GHG emissions nationwide. The AIA supports Congress as it works to pass legislation addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In any climate change bill, Congress should include mechanisms to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions caused by energy used in buildings.

Actions Sought

The AIA supports climate change legislation that will reduce the amount of our nation's greenhouse gas emissions. Congress should recognize that buildings are a major contributor to climate change and include provisions that reduce the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted by the building sector in any legislation addressing climate change.

Explanation and Justification

Buildings in United States, including homes, offices, and industrial sites, account for over 40 percent our nation's carbon dioxide emissions. Most of these emissions come from the combustion of fossil fuels to provide heating, cooling, and lighting and to run electrical equipment and appliances. When combined with other GHG impacts of buildings — such as emissions from the manufacture of building materials and products, the transport of construction and demolition materials, and the passenger and freight transportation associated with urban sprawl—the result is an even larger GHG footprint. Thus, an effective U.S. climate change strategy must consider options for reducing the GHG emissions associated with building construction, use, and location.

Energy efficient building design strategies and technologies currently exist and would require only modest levels of investment to implement. They pay back the capital investment required to implement them over a short period of time through energy savings and generate additional savings thereafter. By taking advantage of these opportunities, the United States could enjoy a more competitive economy, cleaner air, lower GHG emission, and less dependence on foreign oil.

Global warming is the principal emerging environmental issue that requires the attention of 110th Congress. The AIA seeks to extend its assistance regarding the GHGs contributed by the built environment as lawmakers craft solutions to these challenges.

During the first session of the 110th Congress, Senators Joe Lieberman (I-CT) and John Warner (R-VA) introduced climate change legislation that includes provisions relating to the built environment. The Lieberman-Warner bill sets targets for national model energy saving building codes and provides incentives for states that comply with the more-energy efficient building codes. The AIA strongly supports this provision and is committed to working with Congress to develop additional strategies to reduce the built environment's contributions to global warming.

What America Thinks: In a nationwide poll of voters (1,000 sample, margin of error +/- 3.1) conducted January 14-17, 2008, by two respected national pollsters—The Tarrance Group, a Republican firm, and Lake Snell and Perry, a Democratic firm—73 percent of voters polled said that “global warming is already having an effect on weather, and government should immediately put into effect new energy policies that dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

In addition, only 23 percent of voters polled felt that the federal government is doing a *good* job to protect the environment.