REACH CODE NEWS BRIEF: OCTOBER 2026

INTRODUCING THE CODE READINESS PROGRAM: Q&A WITH DECKER RINGO

Q: Thanks for joining us this month, Decker! We'd love to learn more about the Code Readiness Program

A: Happy to be here! The Program began in 2016 with approval from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and serves as a "bridge" between applied research and future regulatory action in the statewide Codes and Standards landscape. The Program helps identify the data needs around statewide policy goals of energy efficiency, decarbonization, and grid reliability, and helps develop the technical foundation needed to support future codes and standards advancement.

For instance, the research benefits the statewide utility Codes and Standards Enhancement (CASE) team's proposals to the Energy Commission to advance the Energy Code. The Program partially funded and informed several technical reports that helped shape measure screening and selection for the 2028 Title 24, Part 6 cycle, such as data center efficiency opportunities. The team also produced research outputs that directly supported the Codes and Standards Enhancement (CASE) team's work on the 2025 Energy Code, such as controlled environment horticulture and residential heat pump water heater performance. The Program also informs proposals for National Model Codes such as the IECC and select ASHRAE standards.

Q: How does the Program identify needed research projects?

A: Often, the CASE team will ask for data if they are working on a specific proposal for an upcoming code cycle. Sometimes, a request may come directly from the California Energy Commission.

Another important achievement has been the creation of a Code Readiness Program Long-term Strategic Roadmap to guide the staging of research priorities. This Roadmap includes an overview of priority research areas, clearly defined regulatory objectives, a project evaluation framework, and a comprehensive master project list. The Roadmap helps prioritize and maintain good alignment between technical research and regulatory needs; the Program strengthens the connection between innovation and policy outcomes.

Q: Does the Program work with any other organizations across the state or beyond to develop these priorities?

A: Yes! We work to engage stakeholders through multiple channels, including project-based collaboration, technical working groups, quarterly stakeholder meetings, and interactive workshops. We also have touchpoints across targeted advocacy, Emerging Technologies, Market Transformation, and utility programs, with particular relevance to PG&E-funded efforts.

Q: What are some specific examples of research efforts to date?

A: The primary outcomes of Code Readiness activities are high-quality data sets to support specific codes and standards objectives, and documents summarizing codes and standards research. For example, in 2025 the Program published findings from four projects presenting research on market-ready technologies, system performance, and regulatory strategies for thermal load management, steam trap fault detection and diagnostics, industrial heat pumps and elevators, all available on the Energy Transition Coordinating Council (ETCC) website.

Q: How do local governments benefit from the Program's work?

A: Often research results provide data from a statewide perspective which can be helpful to local and regional entities. The findings help answer questions and concerns as local staff work on policy development.

Q: What are some resources available to local government staff?

A: We maintain a list of current and recent projects, with project descriptions and timelines, what the regulatory objectives are, category filters and dataset descriptions (coming soon). In addition, you can review the Program Annual Report as well as the Strategic Roadmap.

Q: Are there opportunities for local staff to participate in specific activities or research efforts?

A: Yes! If there are Code Readiness projects or datasets that individuals want to learn more about, or if there's a data gap that you think could be addressed by new Code Readiness research, we would love to hear from you! Our team can be reached at info@codereadiness.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 4: USGBC-CA Event: Wildfire Defense in Practice: Building and Landscape Strategies

November 4: CCR-REN Event: Cold Climates: Best Practices for Residential Energy Compliance

November 5: 3C-REN Event: Collaborative Solutions for Energy Code Compliance: Central Coast Conversation with the CEC, San Luis Obispo

November 5: I-REN C&S Training: Passive House Mechanicals

November 5: CalWEP Event: Designing Direct Install Landscape Transformation Programs Training

November 12: CivicWell event: Microtransit Innovations in Human Services Transportation

November 18: California Energy Commission: Business Meeting

November 19: BayREN Regional Forum: Powering the Bay: How Innovative Tech Can Tame Energy Costs and Increase Resilience

REACH CODE PANEL EXPLORES EMBODIED CARBON AT NET ZERO CONFERENCE

Why Embodied Carbon?

Embodied carbon was a key topic at the 2026 Net Zero Conference earlier this month, where climate leaders gathered to explore strategies to advance building decarbonization. While operational carbon comes from the energy a building

consumes during its use**, embodied carbon refers to emissions associated with building materials and construction**, including raw material extraction, manufacturing, transportation, and installation.

Because these emissions are largely committed before a building opens, local governments can uncover a unique opportunity for decarbonization early in the construction process.

Concrete is often one of the largest sources of embodied carbon in a building project. By setting limits on cement content or global warming potential, jurisdictions can achieve meaningful emissions reductions while encouraging the market to adopt lower-carbon alternatives. During a panel session on Thursday afternoon, October 8, moderated by Amy Discher from Southern California Edison, staff from Marin County and the City of Santa Monica shared lessons from developing and implementing low-carbon concrete ordinances.

Marin County: A Model for Market Transformation

Mark Chhabria, Senior Sustainability Analyst for Marin County, described how the County became an early leader in this space. With support from a Climate Protection Grant, Marin assessed available concrete mixes, supplier capabilities, and opportunities to reduce emissions without compromising strength, durability, or constructability. The County convened a regional working group of structural engineers, concrete suppliers, environmental organizations, public agencies, and other stakeholders. This effort led to Marin's adoption of the first low-carbon concrete ordinance of its kind in the United States in 2019.

Marin designed its ordinance to simplify compliance and enforcement. The building department verifies compliance through mix designs, environmental product declarations (EPDs), and receipts. A list of pre-qualified concrete mixes further streamlines the process, allowing contractors to select compliant products without developing custom solutions for every project.

Chhabria highlighted four lessons for jurisdictions considering similar policies:

1. **Engage the market early.** Understand what suppliers can realistically provide before establishing requirements.

2. **Make compliance easy.** Clear rules and pre-qualified product lists reduce administrative burdens.

3. **Use implementation as education.** Building inspectors and permit staff can help contractors navigate requirements, not just enforce them.

4. **Look beyond individual projects.** Long-term benefits include expanded product availability, supplier innovation, and changing market norms.

What's striking in the case of Marin County is not only the direct climate impact of their local ordinance, but the broader impact it made to the market. In 2025 alone (just 6 years after Marin's ordinance was adopted), the number of pre-qualified mixes available to contractors grew from roughly nine to more than thirty. Since the County's adoption, suppliers began developing more compliant products, becoming more comfortable with the requirements, and in some cases finding that lower-cement mixes were also cost-effective to produce. The shift highlights how the impacts of Marin's ordinance now spill over into the region surrounding the County's borders.

Santa Monica: Flexibility and Forward Planning

Peter Roquemore, Sustainability Analyst for the City of Santa Monica, reinforced the importance of engaging suppliers while planning for practical implementation. Although more local suppliers can meet the City's lower-carbon concrete criteria, challenges remain. Certain mixes may require longer curing times, creating scheduling constraints for large commercial developments and municipal projects.

Santa Monica's experience underscores the importance of balancing ambitious emissions-reduction goals with real-world construction needs, including project timelines, material availability, and flexibility as the market evolves.

Lessons for Local Governments

Marin County and Santa Monica demonstrate how local policy can reduce embodied carbon while accelerating market transformation beyond jurisdictional boundaries. By engaging stakeholders early, simplifying compliance, and planning for implementation challenges, local governments can make lower-carbon materials more accessible and practical.

The broader takeaway: Low-carbon concrete is moving from a specialized alternative toward a more common construction option. Thoughtfully designed local ordinances can help drive that shift, delivering climate benefits that extend well beyond the communities that adopt them.

Ready to take the next step? Jurisdictions interested in reducing embodied carbon can start by assessing local concrete supplier capabilities, reviewing existing low-carbon concrete ordinances from Marin County and Santa Monica, contacting the Statewide Reach Code Program team, and engaging building officials, contractors, and structural engineers to identify feasible requirements. Starting with these conversations can help jurisdictions develop practical, cost-effective policies that reduce emissions while supporting successful implementation.

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