

# HVAC TOTAL SYSTEM PERFORMANCE RATIO: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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## 1. What is the HVAC Total System Performance Ratio (TSPR)?

Based on HVAC systems proven to perform well in five specific building types (office, education, retail, library and fire station), a Total System Performance Ratio compares the annual heating and cooling energy provided to the building to that of the annual carbon emissions of energy consumed by the building's HVAC system.\*

$$\frac{\text{annual heating and cooling energy provided to the building}}{\text{annual carbon emissions of energy consumed by the building's HVAC}} = \text{Total System Performance Ratio}$$

The higher the Total System Performance Ratio, the higher the efficiency of the HVAC system. To meet a state code requirement that incorporates this ratio, mechanical engineers must avoid inefficient system types and configurations that are currently code-compliant.

*\*Carbon emissions factors are provided in the by the Washington State Life Cycle Cost Tool.*

## 2. How is this different than the current Washington State Energy Code requirement for HVAC evaluation?

Today's Washington State Energy Code perpetuates the use of less efficient HVAC systems by treating high- and low-performing HVAC systems equally. This is because a) current code only evaluates the efficiency of equipment within the same category (e.g., electric furnaces are only evaluated against electric furnaces as opposed to alternate and potentially more efficient heating options); and b) current code separately evaluates each individual equipment type within the HVAC system (e.g., chiller, boiler, heat pump, fan and cooling towers), instead of evaluating the HVAC system performance holistically.

While other high-impact systems, such as the building envelope and lighting, are already governed by code requirements that address these nuances, current HVAC code requirements impose minimal market pressure for building designers to consider the overall efficiency of the system.

## 3. Can you provide an example of how the current Washington State Energy Code doesn't encourage the use of efficient HVAC systems?

Yes—take lighting as a comparison. When measuring lighting efficiency, bulbs of various categories are compared against one another to determine which is most efficient (e.g., LEDs are more efficient than incandescent bulbs). However, with current Washington state code, HVAC equipment types are only compared within their product category (e.g., both an electric furnace and a water-source heat pump pass code even though the water-source heat pump is far more efficient). Just as LED usage would drop significantly if incandescent bulbs passed code at the same level as LEDs, the most efficient HVAC options are less likely to be used when current Washington state code does not incentivize their usage.

## 4. What are the benefits of Washington state requiring the Total System Performance Ratio?

As Washington State works to achieve a 70 percent reduction in new building energy use by 2031, performance-based energy codes will likely become increasingly more necessary and prevalent. An HVAC system performance requirement would help familiarize the HVAC industry with this approach and, when combined with whole-building lighting and envelope standards, could help establish a performance path to help Washington achieve its long-term goals.

Additional benefits include:

- ▶ Restricts the use of inefficient HVAC systems, leading to reduced energy use
- ▶ Educates engineers on HVAC system energy use and cost-effective systems that save energy
- ▶ Does not require complex energy modeling
- ▶ Reduces operating costs once building is finished and occupied

## 5. Once adopted, how would building professionals go about calculating this ratio?

Under this proposed solution, the code documentation will include an approach for engineers to calculate the performance ratio using hourly building energy simulation. Alternately, engineers will have the option to input the characteristics of the building and its mechanical systems into a software tool, currently under development by Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL), as a module of the US Department of Energy's Asset Rating Tool. The tool will set a minimum allowable Total System Performance Ratio target for each building type based on its characteristics and climate zone.

## 6. Who created the Total System Performance Ratio?

An HVAC Total System Performance Ratio requirement in Washington State Energy Code is being proposed by the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) and was developed by PNNL. This effort has been evaluated and endorsed as a solution that will result in more efficient HVAC systems that are evaluated based on whole-system performance.

## 7. Who is NEEA?

NEEA is an alliance of more than 140 utilities and energy efficiency organizations working on behalf of more than 13 million energy consumers in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. NEEA is dedicated to accelerating both electric and gas energy efficiency, leveraging its regional partnerships to advance the adoption of energy-efficient products, services and practices.

## 8. What is NEEA's role and involvement in state codes and code changes?

To help meet Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington's respective long-term energy goals, NEEA is committed to raising the bar for commercial energy codes in the region. In partnership with Northwest utilities and the region's leading energy experts, NEEA is working to evolve state commercial codes so they incorporate specific, vetted and viable technologies and design practices that will improve the overall energy efficiency of commercial buildings and the effectiveness of codes in the Northwest. First identifying technologies and practices that, due to market barriers, have not yet been widely adopted despite being previously validated and deemed viable, NEEA will then create strategies to address key barriers, and demonstrate cost-effectiveness and feasibility to target audiences.

## 9. What is the Commercial Code Enhancement initiative?

The Commercial Code Enhancement initiative (CCE) is NEEA's internal program name that encompasses the work they're doing to support the evolution of state commercial codes to require more energy-efficient products and practices, as outlined above.



The Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) is an alliance of more than 140 Northwest utilities and energy efficiency organizations working on behalf of more than 13 million energy consumers. On behalf of Northwest utilities, NEEA's Commercial Code Enhancement (CCE) program seeks to change state commercial codes to require specific, vetted and viable technologies and design practices that will improve the energy efficiency of commercial buildings. **Learn more about NEEA at [neea.org](http://neea.org).**