

Coburn Amendment 1870 - To reduce the administrative waste within green building programs, due to overlap and duplication, and increase the effectiveness of the federal government's green building programs.

In the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) 2012 duplication report, GAO found the federal government operated 94 green building programs within 11 departments. The agencies running the green building programs do not keep track of green building funds, making it impossible to determine the cost of these programs. However, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (stimulus bill) alone provided at least \$13 billion for green building programs.¹

Further, only about a third of the programs have goals and performance measures in place, "therefore, the results of most initiatives and their related investments in green building are unknown."²

This amendment would streamline federal green building programs by requiring agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs, and consolidate overlapping and duplicative functions between programs and agencies. This amendment would also identify and eliminate green building programs that are not required by law, but instead have developed from the discretionary authority of agencies.

Background on duplication:

While there is not a definition of green building, GAO generally considers green building "the practice of designing, constructing, operating, maintaining, and removing buildings in ways that conserve natural resources and reduce pollution."³ Federal green building programs may include one or more of the following elements:

- Energy conservation or efficiency measures
- Indoor environmental quality measures
- Water conservation or efficiency measures
- Integrated designed principles
- Sustainable siting or location measures

¹ GAO-12-79: Green Building: Federal Initiatives for the Nonfederal Sector Could Benefit from More Interagency Collaboration. Government Accountability Office. November 2011. <http://gao.gov/assets/590/586022.pdf>.

² GAO-12-342SP: 2012 Annual Report: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue. Government Accountability Office. February 2012. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/588818.pdf>.

³ GAO-12-342SP: 2012 Annual Report: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue. Government Accountability Office. February 2012. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/588818.pdf>.

- Measures to reduce the environmental impact of materials

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was created “to consolidate in one agency a variety of federal research, monitoring, standard-setting and enforcement activities to ensure environmental protection” yet in 2012, GAO reported finding 94 initiatives, operated through 11 agencies, promoting green building. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Energy operate two-thirds of the green building programs. Forty-seven of the programs are grants, nine programs provide loans, five offer tax credits, three offer tax deductions, and forty-five initiatives offer technical assistance. These programs are directed towards owners and renters, local governments, businesses, nonprofits, and state governments.

Two-thirds (64) of the programs are directly involved in promoting green building and the remaining programs (30) indirectly support green building.

Number of Programs per Department:

Department of Agriculture, 8 programs
Department of Defense, 1 program
Department of Education, 2 programs
Department of Energy, 17 programs
Department of Health and Human Services, 1 program
Department of Housing and Urban Development, 29 programs
Department of Transportation, 5 programs
Department of the Treasury, 8 programs
Environmental Protection Agency, 18 programs
National Institute of Standards and Technology, 3 programs
Small Business Administration, 2 programs

Evaluation of program effectiveness:

Only about one-third of federal green building programs have goals and metrics in place to determine the program effectiveness. For example, the Department of Energy does not require grant recipients to report on energy savings and emissions reductions, making it impossible to determine the results of the grant programs. **This amendment would require each department to identify and report on which programs have goals and performance measures in place.**

Currently, federal agencies are required to measure and report on their “progress in making federal buildings greener. Because federal agencies have experience with measuring progress

in the federal sector, they are well-positioned to apply this experience to measuring such progress in the nonfederal sector, as well.”⁴

Agencies would also be required to report on the outcomes of each program, and recommend ways to eliminate duplication and overlap through program consolidation and elimination.

Elimination of Programs Created through Discretionary Authority:

In GAO’s 2011 report on green buildings it noted that some programs were created by statute, but others, such as Energy’s Superior Energy Performance Program, were created under the agency’s discretionary authority. **This amendment would require agencies to identify which green building programs are required in statute, and eliminate all other programs.** Any remaining projects and non-duplicative functions would be transferred to another program within the same agency.

⁴ GAO-12-79: Green Building: Federal Initiatives for the Nonfederal Sector Could Benefit from More Interagency Collaboration. Government Accountability Office. November 2011. <http://gao.gov/assets/590/586022.pdf>.