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Lack of updated commercial building energy data troubles National Institute of Building Sciences

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The National Institute of Building Sciences is alarmed that efforts to produce high-performance buildings may stall without up-to-date data following the news that the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) will not be releasing results of its 2007 Commercial Buildings Energy Consumption Survey (CBECS) due to statistical issues. The Institute is also troubled because EIA is suspending work on its 2011 survey due to budget constraints, which means the last reliable data, from the 2003 survey, is nearly a decade old.

"The building industry relies on the availability of benchmark data and metrics from the CBECS to set goals and evaluate progress," said Institute president Henry Green, honor AIA. "The nation is in the midst of a fundamental shift toward high-performance buildings. The significant gap of reliable data from the EIA is extremely troubling at a time when the building community is thirsting for quantifiable statistics to show their actions to save energy are working."

Many efforts within the building community rely on the CBECS statistics, in particular the EnergyStar program. EnergyStar, which is overseen by the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy, uses CBECS data to establish its energy use benchmarks for buildings. Both the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB) and the Green Building Initiative's GreenGlobes tools reference EnergyStar as a baseline and some jurisdictions, such as Washington, D.C. and New York City, require disclosure of a building's EnergyStar score. Because the EnergyStar program compares a building to its peers, the value of making comparisons will diminish as the underlying CBECS data becomes older.

In the wake of the troubling news from EIA, the Institute is establishing a High-Performance Building Data Collection Initiative to identify a path forward for collecting and disseminating data on all high-performance building attributes, not just energy use. This Initiative will allow the building community to still obtain the building energy data necessary to achieve national objectives for high-performance buildings.

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