


Federal committee calls for greener government office buildings



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The federal government is on a path to making the building it owns environmentally sustainable.

Topics : [House of Commons](#) , [Environmental Design](#) , [Arborus Consulting](#) , [Ottawa](#)

And those involved in the industry say it will be big business for Ottawa's green companies – someday.

Earlier this month, a House of Commons committee released a [report](#) detailing recommendations about how to improve the energy efficiency of federal government buildings.

It is just the latest in a string of recent moves the feds have made in that direction. A policy is already on the books that says all new buildings must receive the seal of approval known as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED.

The new report takes another step in that direction by charting a course towards bringing existing buildings up to snuff.

But those involved in the industry say it's too early for green energy companies to start lining up for contracts with the federal government.

"It's starting in little fits and starts but it isn't like there's a clear path forward on how some of the participants in this can actually engage," said Robin Hutcheson, the president of Arborus Consulting, an energy efficiency firm.

The federal government has decided that owning efficient buildings is of value, he said. However it's still a ways away from figuring out some of the specifics for how to reach that goal, such as how much money it wants to allocate.

Mr. Hutcheson said the report, authored by the standing committee on government operations and estimates, gets the government closer to where it wants to be.

It suggested several potential avenues, such as entering into public-private partnerships, for getting there. Ultimately, though, most of its recommendations involve studying the issues further.

That hasn't put a stop to optimism about what this will mean for local industries.

"When you start to look at this from a massive scale standpoint – I have no idea about the number of jobs or how it relates back – but it's clearly going to be a very good thing for Ottawa," said James McNeil, a broker with Cushman and Wakefield specializing in green real estate.

He suggested that new energy efficiency policies from the federal government – which is responsible for leasing the vast majority of downtown office space – would force a “massive change” in how the real estate community operates.

That’s because companies would have to change their practices so they are eligible to work on federal government offices.

Mr. Hutcheson said any new green building policies would represent particular opportunities for Ottawa’s technology sector, since many of them will be able to come up with new systems for monitoring a building’s performance. He believes consulting firms, those that audit a building’s efficiency or provide advice on retrofits, should also stand to benefit.

But for now those just remain possibilities. The federal government has only taken one step along what promises to be a very long road.