

The most significant changes in the 2025 California building codes, which take effect January 1, 2026, include stricter standards for electrification, enhanced fire and seismic safety, and more rigorous green building and accessibility requirements.

The updates apply to all newly constructed buildings and affect substantial additions and alterations to existing structures.

Key changes in the 2025 California Building Code (Title 24, Part 2)

- **Enhanced wildfire safety:** Following the creation of the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) code, California is adopting stricter fire-resistance standards for buildings in high-risk zones, including requiring fire-rated, ember-resistant vents.
- **Mass timber expansion:** The use of mass timber as a sustainable structural option is expanded, allowing for taller wood buildings (up to 18 stories for certain types) with new detailing and connection requirements.
- **Updated seismic design:** New seismic provisions incorporate the latest USGS data, potentially increasing design forces in high-risk areas and adding stricter requirements for structures near active faults.
- **Updated structural loads:** Adjusted requirements for snow and wind loads reflect updated maps and trends, affecting building design, especially for canopies and solar panels.
- **Accessibility for EV charging:** New provisions clarify that accessible electric vehicle charging spaces are required, with specific standards for signage and space.
- **Balcony and Elevated Exterior Element Safety:** In response to events like the Berkeley balcony collapse, the 2025 code will incorporate stricter requirements for the design, materials, and waterproofing of balconies and other elevated exterior elements. This includes enhanced load-bearing standards and more robust inspection mandates during construction.

Key changes in the 2025 Energy Code (Title 24, Part 6)

- **Heat Pumps for Space and Water Heating:** For newly constructed residential buildings, the prescriptive compliance path now mandates all-electric heat pump systems for space and water heating. While gas furnaces can still be used, they require compliance through the more complex performance method. This effectively phases out the standard installation of gas furnaces and water heaters in new homes.

- **Electric-Ready Infrastructure:** New buildings must be pre-wired for future electric appliances, including commercial kitchens, to encourage later upgrades to cleaner technologies.
- **Stricter Ventilation Standards:** Indoor air quality is improved with stronger ventilation requirements for multifamily buildings.
- **Updated solar and battery rules:** Requirements for solar photovoltaic and battery storage systems are updated for high-rise multifamily and nonresidential buildings.

Key changes in the 2025 Green Building Standards Code (Title 24, Part 11)

- **New energy metric:** The framework for assessing energy performance shifts from Time Dependent Valuation (TDV) to the more comprehensive Long-Term System Cost (LSC), which incorporates life-cycle costs and greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Mandatory EV chargers:** The code replaces the previous "EV-Capable" standard with more stringent mandates for installing actual Level 2 EV chargers and receptacle outlets in residential buildings.
- **Construction waste management:** All projects must now have a formal construction waste management plan that includes a 65% diversion requirement.
- **Embodied Carbon Limits:** For the first time, CALGreen will introduce requirements to measure and reduce the embodied carbon of building materials. This will apply to new nonresidential buildings larger than 100,000 square feet and will focus on key structural materials like concrete and steel. This change will require new documentation (like Environmental Product Declarations) and design strategies. (This regulation went into effect in July 2024).