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Washington Clean Buildings Tier 2:

What Apartment Owners Need to Do

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Who's covered (Tier 2): In Washington State, medium-sized buildings (20,000–50,000 sq ft) and all multifamily buildings over 20,000 sq ft must comply with the Tier 2 Clean Buildings Standard. (If your apartments plus any mixed uses total over 20,000 sq ft, you're in.) The first reporting deadline is **July 1, 2027**. The law's purpose is to **cut energy costs and pollution** in existing buildings, so compliance is aimed at saving you money, not penalizing you. Penalties (up to \$0.30/sq ft) only apply if you fail to submit the required documentation.

Below are the three core requirements, explained in plain language, along with practical steps, time estimates, and resources.



1. Benchmarking (Track 12 Months of Energy Use)

- **What it means:** Collect and record your building’s energy use (electricity, gas, steam, etc.) for at least 12 consecutive months, then enter that data into a tracking tool. This “benchmarking” gives you a baseline of how much energy your building uses. Washington law says your utility must help: large utilities (25,000+ customers) will automatically upload your data to EPA’s Portfolio Manager tool, and smaller utilities must give you a spreadsheet of your usage.
- **Why it matters:** Knowing your energy use helps you spot waste or inefficiencies. It’s also required for compliance. (Unlike larger Tier 1 buildings, Tier 2 buildings do not yet have to meet a specific energy target – but you still must track usage and create a target to show you’ve checked.) Tracking energy now makes future efficiency projects easier and can lower bills over time.
- **Practical steps:**
 - o **Get set up:** Create a free account in EPA’s **Energy Star Portfolio Manager** [see [Resources for building compliance](#)] (ESPM) – the standard online benchmarking tool. (No cost.) Fill in the basics of your building (address, square footage, uses, etc.). [See the Quick-start Guide](#).
 - o **Gather data:** Ask your utility(ies) for the past 12 months of energy use. Washington law requires them to help: large utilities upload directly to Portfolio Manager, small utilities send you an Excel file. You can also use your utility bills if needed.
 - o **Enter data:** Upload or copy the usage numbers into Portfolio Manager. The system will normalize for weather (to compare year-to-year) and calculate an energy use intensity (EUI) – the energy used per square foot. For compliance, you’ll also set a state-calculated target EUI (even though you don’t have to meet it yet).
- **Documentation:** Keep copies of your utility bills and Portfolio Manager reports. You’ll need these records when you report compliance. The Portfolio Manager will allow you to export reports (keep those PDFs or screenshots).
- **Time/Effort:** Initial setup might take a few hours (creating an account, entering building info, and one year of data). After that, gathering new data each year is straightforward. If your utilities automate the upload, it’s mostly “set and forget.” For a single apartment building, a busy manager could do this, but allow a day or two for the first year’s data.
- **Who can do it:** A property manager or maintenance person can handle benchmarking. No special license is needed. If it feels too technical, you can enlist the help of a consultant or one of the state’s [qualified energy management providers](#).

2. Energy Management Plan (EMP)

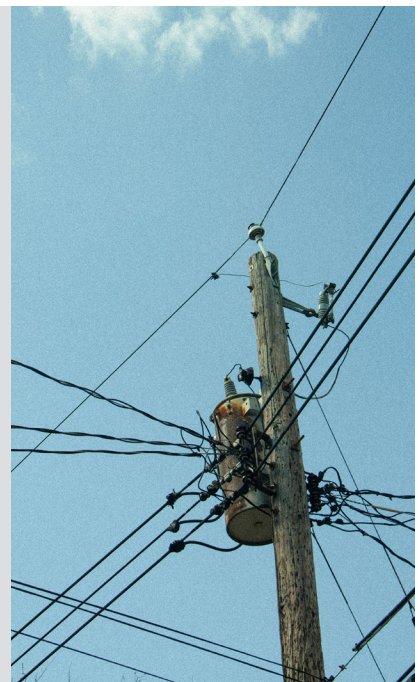
- **What it means:** Create a simple **written plan** that describes how you will manage and reduce your building’s energy use. It doesn’t have to be a long, formal document – think of it as a roadmap and checklist for your staff. In it, you’ll note the building’s energy baseline (from benchmarking), goals (e.g., “reduce wasted energy”), and the actions and schedules you’ll use to save energy. You also assign responsibilities (such as who checks utility bills and who orders audits, etc.).
- **Why it matters:** The EMP ensures that someone is responsible for monitoring energy use and driving improvement. It helps turn benchmarking data into action. The state requires **an EMP for every Tier 2 building**. Even though Tier 2 buildings aren’t forced to meet an energy target yet, having a plan means you’ll catch problems early and can save on energy bills.

- **Practical steps:**

- o **Start simple:** Outline key elements, e.g., “Our building currently uses X kWh of electricity and Y therms of gas per year.” Then, list who (position or person) is responsible for energy, how often they’ll review bills, and what actions to take (such as scheduling an HVAC tune-up or planning future upgrades).

- o **Use a template:** To make it easy, Commerce offers sample EMP templates (for example, the [ArchEcology Energy Management Plan Template](#)). You can copy or adapt one of these. They’re free resources.

- o **Include targets (optional):** You may note your EUI target from benchmarking. (Tier 2 doesn’t have to reach it yet, but having the number can guide you.) The template can suggest items such as energy savings goals, staff training plans, or the timing of energy audits.



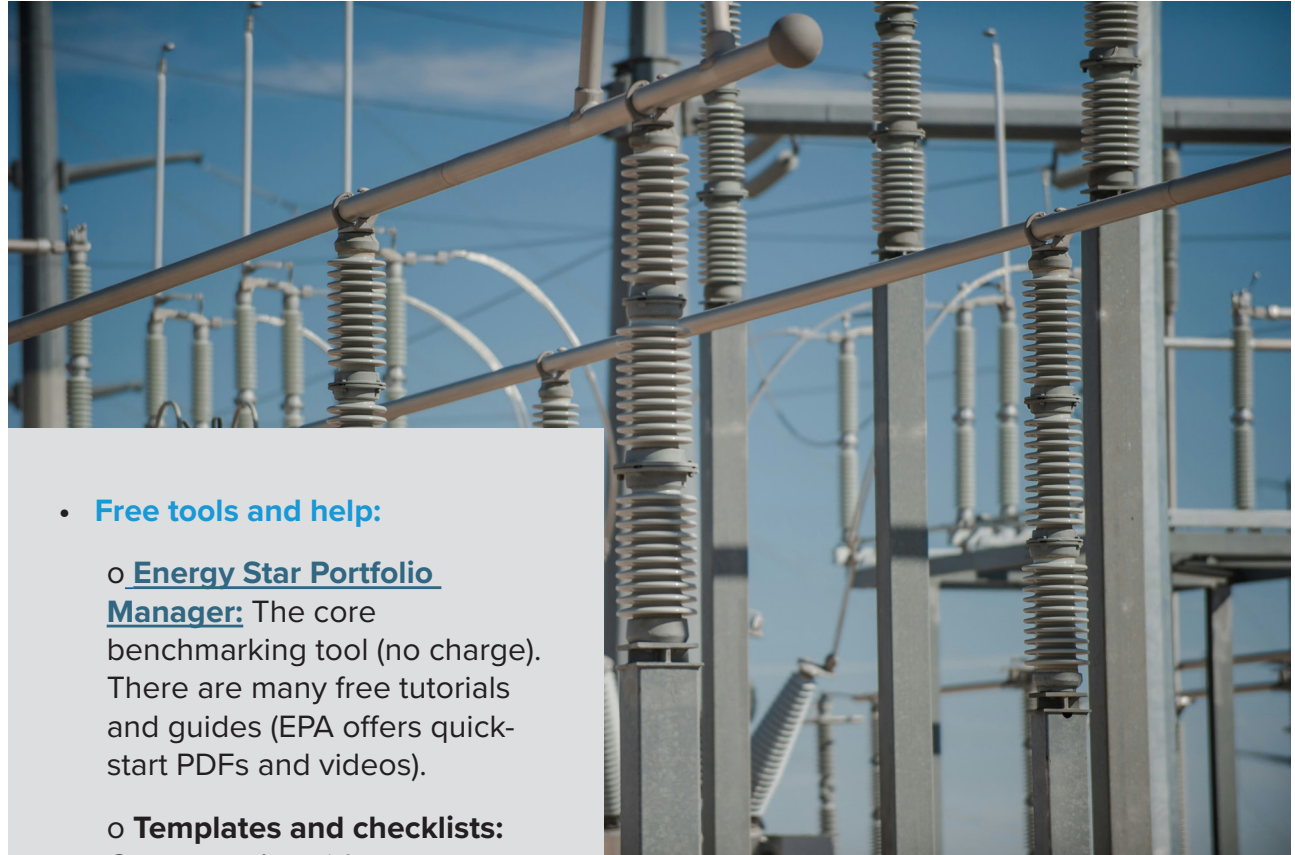
- **Documentation:** Once written, save the EMP document (PDF or Word). Review and update it annually (or as systems change). You don’t have to submit it with the form immediately, but you’ll need to submit or reference it in your compliance filing.
- **Time/Effort:** Writing a basic EMP usually takes a few hours up-front. After that, it’s “low maintenance.” It mostly requires occasional updates when you’ve taken a new efficiency step. An in-house manager can often draft this, especially using a template. If you prefer, an energy consultant or engineer can write one – many firms provide EMP services.
- **Who can do it:** The building owner is responsible, but you can delegate the task to someone else. Often, the property manager or facilities supervisor leads this effort. Because Tier 2 compliance officially requires a **“Qualified Energy Manager”** to oversee these plans, if you don’t have someone with energy management training on staff, consider hiring a part-time energy consultant or tapping a **BEACON Fellow** (a state program that places energy experts with building owners).

3. Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Program

- **What it means:** Establish and follow a routine maintenance plan for your building systems that affect energy use. This includes HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), lighting, boilers, pumps, and other related systems. The O&M program is essentially a list of tasks and schedules designed to keep equipment running efficiently – for example, changing air filters on schedule, calibrating controls annually, and addressing leaks, among others.
- **Why it matters:** Good maintenance prevents energy waste. For instance, a clogged filter makes an AC work harder (and cost more). Proper O&M also prevents breakdowns. Washington requires an O&M program in Tier 2 buildings, meaning you must have it documented and in place by the deadline. (Again, no fixed energy target yet, but an O&M plan sets you up for meeting goals down the road.)
- **Practical steps:**
 - o **List your equipment:** Identify major energy-consuming systems (HVAC units, boilers, chillers, lighting systems, etc.).
 - o **Define tasks and schedules:** For each system, document the required maintenance and its frequency. For example: “Change air filters every 3 months,” “Check boiler combustion efficiency annually,” “Inspect and replace faulty light bulbs promptly,” “Calibrate thermostats twice a year,” and so on. If you have a maintenance vendor, they may already have schedules; incorporate those.
 - o **Use checklists:** Free tools can help. For example, the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory offers a [Small Building O&M Checklist](#) to ensure you don’t miss obvious steps. (Consultants can also create a customized list for you.)
 - o **Assign responsibilities:** Note who (maintenance staff or outside contractor) will do each task, and where records will be kept (paper logbook or digital file).
- **Documentation:** Keep an **operations log** or folder. After each maintenance activity, record the date, task, and any notes. This log or checklist is your proof that the O&M program is active. You don’t need to file this with Commerce at this time, but it should be ready in case of an audit.
- **Time/Effort:** Creating the plan might take a few hours (possibly working with your maintenance techs). Once running, it adds only a bit of time to regular maintenance visits or tasks you’re already doing. Over the year, plan on a few minutes each week/month per building to tick off maintenance items. For a typical multifamily building, much of this is **good building management**.
- **Who can do it:** Typically, building maintenance staff or your property manager will handle this. Even small teams can implement an O&M program if tasks are clear. If you lack in-house expertise, an energy consultant or HVAC contractor can develop the plan and train your staff. Remember that Tier 2 compliance requires a qualified person to oversee operations and maintenance (O&M), so you may want to consider using a certified professional for guidance. [\[There is a live dashboard of certified professionals here.\]](#) [\[There is a live dashboard of qualified energy auditors here.\]](#)

Putting it All Together – Tips & Resources.

- **Documentation & Reporting:** Eventually (by July 1, 2027), you'll log into the state's **Clean Buildings Portal**¹ and submit a compliance report. At a minimum, that report will confirm that you've completed the 12-month benchmarking and have (and will implement) your EMP and O&M programs. Until then, collect and organize the necessary materials, such as the Portfolio Manager export, utility statements, your EMP document, and O&M logs.



- **Free tools and help:**
 - **Energy Star Portfolio Manager:** The core benchmarking tool (no charge). There are many free tutorials and guides (EPA offers quick-start PDFs and videos).
 - **Templates and checklists:** Commerce's guidance page links to an **Energy Management Plan template** and an **O&M checklist**. The Smart Buildings Center and other partners also offer sample plans and tools.

¹ Access to the Clean Buildings Portal requires a Secure Access Washington (SAW) government account. Details on how to **"Access the Clean Buildings Portal"** are located here. You can set up access through your Washington Government portal. You will have to use the code CBPS21 (all caps, no spaces). Complete the identity verification questions and click OK. Then you can launch the portal. See the link above for a more detailed explanation.

- o **Utility and local programs:** Many Washington utilities and cities offer assistance. For example, Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light, Avista, Tacoma Power, and others have Clean Buildings support or incentive programs. These can include free benchmarking help, incentives for upgrades, or technical support. Check your utility’s website.
 - o **Training and advice:** Commerce and its partners provide webinars (e.g., [“Clean Buildings 101,”](#) EMP workshops) and office hours. You can join an upcoming [Clean Buildings info session](#) [held on Zoom]. These sessions enable you to connect with staff, ask questions, discuss scenarios, and more. These office hours are held on the 4th Tuesday of every month from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Pacific Time.
- **Effort estimate:** Overall, Tier 2 compliance is much lighter than Tier 1. If you have one building, expect to spend approximately 1–3 days upfront (collecting data and drafting plans) and then maintain them throughout the year. It’s realistic for a busy property manager to handle, but don’t hesitate to bring in help when needed. An experienced engineer or energy consultant can expedite the process (and ensure it’s done correctly), but it’s not strictly required for every step. In fact, the state **encourages early compliance. It even offers an incentive:** for a limited time, building owners who complete these Tier 2 tasks early can receive up to \$0.30 per square foot in incentive payments. (That means for a 20,000 sq ft building, you could earn ~\$6,000 back.)

Bottom line:

For multifamily owners, these requirements boil down to “know your energy use and have a written plan to improve it.”

Start by:

1. Logging in to Portfolio Manager and grabbing last year’s bills.
2. Then, jot down a simple Energy Management Plan and O&M checklist – you’ll likely discover quick wins (like resetting thermostats or cleaning coils) along the way.
3. Keeping it straightforward will make compliance routine, help your bottom line, and keep you on the right side of the law, avoiding penalties of up to 0.30 per square foot (\$6,000 for a 20,000 SF building).

Sources: Official Commerce guidance on Tier 2 compliance and the Clean Buildings law, plus state-recommended resources (energy plan templates and O&M checklists). [Refer to Commerce’s Clean Buildings website and notices for complete details.](#)

Disclaimer: This does not constitute legal advice, but represents HFO’s best effort at providing a simplified outline of the steps required by the State of Washington. Consult a qualified energy auditor or certified professional from the state’s dashboards (links above) for expert advice.

