

Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide and Reference Manual (v1.5) FAQ

U.S. Department of Energy
Building Technologies Office

March 2015

Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide v1.5 FAQ

Section 1: Use and Management of the Mark

Q: We have been using the ENERGY STAR mark for years. Do we really need to submit all materials using the mark for DOE review?

A: Yes, Sponsors should submit for review any new materials that utilize the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR mark and/or name. Once DOE has a sense that you understand the proper use of the name and mark, Sponsors are able to develop materials with more independence.

Q: Does it really take 5 days for DOE to process logo and brand reviews for all materials?

A: Not usually. When Sponsors submit materials that are lengthy or seek to use the mark and name in new or different ways, it may require more time. DOE will work with Sponsors to meet all timeframes and deadlines as much as possible.

Q: Are participating contractors required to use the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR mark?

A: Participating contractors, in good and active standing with their Sponsor, are encouraged, but not required, to use the mark to differentiate their services.

Q: Can we co-brand by using our own program mark with the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR mark on marketing materials?

A: Absolutely! Sponsors are not only allowed, but encouraged to leverage their own brands in combination with the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR mark. Just be sure to follow EPA's [Brand Book](#) to ensure proper use of the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR mark. And, remember that your Account Manager is available to answer any specific questions you may have regarding use of the mark.

Q: Can the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Program provide sales training services to our contractors?

A: DOE does not provide training services for participating contractors. There are a variety of training programs available through private market vendors including trainings specific to home performance contracting business development and sales. If you are having trouble finding one that meets your needs, please contact your Account Manager for assistance.

Q: Will there be any updates to “My ENERGY STAR Account” (MESA), including new material and templates?

A: Yes. On a periodic basis DOE will add new or revised content to MESA for Sponsors and participating contractors to use. Check back frequently or ask your Account Manager for assistance.

Q: Are we required to provide the customer a certificate of completion for all projects?

A: No, DOE does not require certificates of completion to be issued for HPwES projects. However, many Sponsors who issue certificates have found that offering a certificate of efficiency improvements or a certificate of performance to be useful in motivating customer to action, communicating results, and demonstrating enhanced real estate value. Additional

information on how to use certificates correctly in the HPwES Program can be found in Section 1 of the [Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide v1.5](#).

Q: Are Sponsors required to use DOE’s Home Energy Score?

A: No, Sponsors are not required to use the DOE Home Energy Score in conducting a Home Performance with ENERGY STAR project nor on any subsequent certificate of completion; but the Home Energy Score or other scoring system could be a useful tool for contractors to use in motivating homeowner investment in efficiency upgrades.

The [Home Energy Score](#) allows qualified technicians to generate a reliable, quick energy assessment in less than an hour. Use of the Home Energy Score is action oriented and offers homeowners affordable, reliable, easy way to understand homes’ energy performance – it’s a “miles per gallon” home score.

Section 2: Program Design

Q: We understand that the consultant delivery model can alleviate the need for installation contractors to invest in "diagnostic tools, training, and credentialing" but unless the consultant is going to be on each site during each day, someone on the installer's crew will need at least basic testing skills to ensure safe conditions. Is this correct?

A: Yes, at a minimum, installers must be trained to verify safe conditions at the end of each work day “in compliance with local building codes and industry-accepted protocols” in addition to being well-versed on the installation specifications for the work they do. It is also encouraged that installers be trained to use basic diagnostic tests to measure and verify their results over the course of the installation. In particular, blower door tests are a vital tool for air sealing crews to use to guide their work. Infrared scans can similarly assist insulation installers, depending on the weather conditions at the time of the installation.

Q: When designing a HPwES program, is a prescriptive or performance based approach preferable? What considerations should we be concerned with in making this decision as it relates to incentive design, energy modeling, or other critical program implementation elements?

A: The correct answer depends on a variety of factors unique to each individual Sponsor’s program. These factors include, but are not limited to the budget and resources available to the program, and any statutory and/or regulatory goals and restrictions the program may be subject to. Issues for consideration are discussed in Section 2 of the [Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide v1.5](#).

Section 3: Workforce Development

Q: Are sample Contractor Participation Agreements (CPA’s) available that we may use as templates?

A: Given that CPA’s typically contain legal language which may be unique to each Sponsoring entity and location, DOE does not maintain a library of samples or templates. However, upon request, your Account Manager can assist in facilitating contact with other Sponsors who would be willing to share their CPA’s for use as examples. It is always encouraged that any legally binding document be reviewed by the Sponsor’s own legal counsel before being put into use in the program.

Q: The requirements call for participating contractors to have diagnostic and assessment skills. How do the v1.5 minimum requirements apply to a situation where these are not the responsibility of the installing contractor?

A: The minimum requirements apply to "participating contractors" (i.e. those who have signed CPA's with the Sponsor.) A non-credentialed sub-contractor can be used to install measures if actions are taken to ensure there is project oversight by a qualified person.

In the case of a consultant model, the consultant would be the "participating contractor" executing the CPA.

Section 4: The Assessment

Q: The requirement for data collection of building assemblies and mechanical systems is a vague description. What level of detail is expected?

A whole house assessment cannot be completed without collecting some information about the existing conditions of the building assemblies and mechanical systems. The intent is to document the existing attributes of the home so a baseline record is created that can be utilized as a basis for energy savings calculations, performance ratings, and to assist in any future interactions with the customer. It is left to the Sponsor's discretion to determine the level of detail required in documentation. However, the detail should be sufficient to re-create any relevant energy performance characteristics of the home that could inform future interventions. In addition it is important to document any condition issues related to health and safety and will be addressed in the scope of work.

Q: Sponsors do not typically require auditors/contractors to gather data about appliances. Is this a requirement or a recommendation?

A: The requirement is intended to document that appliances were taken into consideration during the assessment process. A complete inventory of existing appliances is not required. The report should simply note if there are any existing appliances where a replacement or other upgrade could obviously benefit the customer. This should be standard customer service regardless of program offers, but is especially important if there are additional rebates available for the replacement of these appliances.

Q Our contractors do not typically gather make and model numbers for heating and cooling systems. What do we need to do to satisfy this requirement?

A: System makes and model numbers are usually easy to collect and are important for clearly documenting existing conditions that enable data QA. Having this documentation, provides a resource for verifying the rated system efficiencies as well as other performance data. This requirement can be satisfied by documenting make and model in a data system or on paper, or by including a photograph of the equipment nameplate in the customer's file. In cases where the nameplate is missing or unreadable, the contractor should document as much information as is available along with any assumptions that were made to determine system efficiencies.

Q: Our program does not typically require "design flaws" to be documented in the customer report. How much latitude do program Sponsors have to define what must be in the HEA report?

A: Design flaws that will be directly or indirectly addressed in the course of completing the improvements described in the scope of work must be documented in the HEA report so the customer and the program both have a record of what was repaired. Design flaws that are both not relevant to the scope of work and are outside of the contractor's expertise are

not required to be documented. In all cases, if Sponsors or contractors are unsure of their level of responsibility for any given project, the Guiding Principles on page 28 of the [Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide v1.5](#) may help guide your decision-making.

Q: Health and safety tests results are not always reported to customers on the Home Assessment Report. The tests results themselves are not that meaningful to customers. How does DOE expect this information to be communicated?

A: The reference to health and safety test results is intended as a disclosure to inform the customer of tests completed and anything that should be repaired. DOE does not expect programs to report raw testing data that a customer wouldn't understand. However, sufficient information about health and safety results should be conveyed to the customer to enable them to make an informed decision about next steps and/or seek additional guidance from a specialist.

Q: Can the Home Energy Score tool be used as the method to generate a Home Performance Assessment under HPwES v1.5?

A: The Home Energy Score certificate, in and of itself, is not sufficient to report out on all of the required elements of the HPA report. However, the process of inspecting the home to collect the information to generate a Home Energy Score can be leveraged to collect the data needed to complete a full HPA. Refer to Section 4 of the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide V1.5 for a complete listing of the required elements of an HPA and the HPA report.

Q: Are we required to collect the historical energy bills for every customer or project?

A: No, but it is encouraged to try to obtain sufficient information about historical energy consumption to be able to compare predicted energy savings to past consumption as a validity test.

This “true up” process could be as comprehensive as following [BPI-2400](#) to calibrate a whole house energy model, or as simple as comparing the customer’s self-reported energy costs to the estimated savings as a reality check to avoid gross over-predictions.

HPwES Sponsors should establish standard procedures for collecting consumption information and how it will be applied given your specific approach to energy savings calculations and the kinds of heating fuels used by your customers.

Q: If the customer is asking for insulation, why do I have to inspect the mechanical equipment or vice versa?

A: Use of a whole house approach is a defining feature of Home Performance with ENERGY STAR. Insulation contractors are not expected to become experts in HVAC (or vice versa), but it is important that the existing conditions of the energy related features of the home are evaluated during the home performance assessment. The assessment report should include recommendations for improvements that could save the homeowner energy even if those improvements are not services that the assessor provides or measures that are not eligible for incentives. This will help the customer better understand the full scope of energy improvements they should be considering to achieve optimum home performance and will help manage their expectations should they decide not to complete all of the recommended improvements at once. Training and credentialing programs are available for contractors to learn the basics of whole house assessments so they can evaluate improvements outside the scope of their core trade.

Q: Are blower door and duct leakage tests required? How do we select which diagnostics to use and when to use them?

A: Blower door tests are required:

- Before and after the installation when scope of work includes measures that could potentially impact the air exchange rates of the building in ways that can't otherwise be measured.
- During the assessment when necessary to evaluate the existing conditions so a prioritized list of proposed improvements can be developed

Blower door tests are recommended:

- During the installation by air sealing installation crews to guide their work
- During the assessment as a customer education and sales tool
- During the assessment to assist in predicting post-installation conditions that could lead to the need for mechanical ventilation that isn't already specified in the scope of work

For example, blower door tests are required to measure pre and post conditions when air sealing a home. On the other hand, adding a ventilation system to the home will impact the air exchange rates in a way that is measurable without a blower door so a ventilation system installation on its own would not trigger the blower door requirement.

The pre- post-installation blower door requirement is not limited to air sealing. Other measures like closed cavity insulation, window improvements, and some kinds of duct sealing work could also effectively tighten the home. A blower door test should be used to measure the change in air exchange rates to quantify energy savings and to support calculations for ventilation requirements.

When completing Home Performance Assessments, blower door tests may be necessary under certain conditions, but not all the time. The purpose of the HPA is to evaluate the existing conditions of the home and collect sufficient data to develop a prioritized list of proposed improvements based on building science principles and the “house- as- a- system” approach. To accomplish this, it is necessary to evaluate the integrity of the home’s air barrier sufficiently to develop a scope of work for air sealing and ventilation measures. In some cases, it is possible for an experienced technician to achieve that goal without a blower door. For instance, when working in a neighborhood or development where every home is built the same way and the technician has familiarity with that particular model of home from prior experience. On the other hand, blower doors are useful tools for communicating with and motivating homeowners, so there are compelling reasons to include blower door tests in the standard assessment even if they are not always technically necessary.

The rationale described above for blower door tests may be applied to other diagnostic tests as well. For instance, duct leakage testing is not required at the time of the assessment, but must be used to measure pre- and post-installation conditions when duct sealing is completed.

Additional discussion of this topic is available in the [Fall 2014 Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Newsletter](#) and Sections 4 and 5 of the [Home Performance with ENERGY STAR Sponsor Guide v1.5](#).

Section 5: The Installation

Q: In regards to sequencing of measure installations, every project is different and appropriate sequencing will vary depending on the home. What specifically is the Sponsor expected to review for quality control of the sequencing of work?

A: When reviewing home energy assessment reports, the correct sequencing of measures applies to the proposed improvement measures. When reviewing the installation, the correct sequencing of measures applies to the contracted scope of work. The quality control review should be used to identify situations where proper sequencing is in place to ensure energy savings are achieved, risks to health and safety are mitigated, and the customer's needs are being met.

Q: What is meant by the “review of commissioning reports” requirement at the test-out phase? Can you explain what that documentation would look like?

A: The installing contractor is responsible for documenting that newly repaired or installed equipment is operating within the manufacturer's specifications. If the person conducting the test-out is not performing these validation tests himself, the installer's reported “commissioning” results are acceptable.

Section 6: Quality Assurance

Q: Customer information is often considered confidential by some Sponsors, so sharing customer records for QA purposes with DOE, EPA, etc. will require Sponsor approval and may not be possible. How can Sponsors and their implementation contractors comply with DOE's requests for QA records when the customer data is considered private?

A: DOE understands the need to protect the customer's privacy and the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR team does not ask for records that contain any sensitive or personally identifiable information (PII and SPII). When project records are requested for QA purposes, all PII and SPII data should be removed or anonymized prior to submitting those records to DOE or its vendors.

Q: Is participation in the Building Performance Institute's GoldStar program a requirement for the QMS option for v1.5?

A: No, participation in BPI's or any other private market QA/QC program is not required for the QMS option. While “off the shelf” tools and services like GoldStar could be helpful in satisfying some of the requirements, it is still the Sponsor's choice to use or not use these kinds of products.

Section 7: Data and Reporting

Q: When reporting projects to DOE where the company performing the assessment is different from the company installing the improvements, or if multiple installation contractors work on a single home, which company should be credited with the project?

Each project submitted to DOE should have one primary contractor and should be reported as such. The primary contractor usually takes greater responsibility for the HPwES project by performing the pre-assessment and/or the post assessment. The primary contractor must be a "participating contractor" (i.e. those who have signed CPA's with the Sponsor.) The attribution of projects to contractors impacts the number of quality assurance inspections required for each contractor as well as eligibility for Century Club awards.

Q: Please clarify DOE's definition of a multifamily unit.

A: Our definition of a multifamily unit is left somewhat to the Sponsor’s discretion. Since different programs use various definitions for multifamily, DOE asks only that you provide an explanation of how your program distinguishes multifamily projects from single family even if “single family” includes multi-unit buildings as is common in many utility programs. DOE is specifically interested in projects that are completed in buildings that would typically fall within the domain of residential codes, so high rise multifamily buildings are not currently covered under HPwES.

Q: How will our program data be used?

A: DOE publishes [data dashboards](#) on the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR website and updates them quarterly using data provided by Sponsors in the quarterly reporting templates. The data reported to DOE in the annual report template is used for multiple purposes, including:

- Verification of on-going compliance with the program’s minimum requirements
- Tracking of changes to the Sponsor’s implementation plan
- Combined with quarterly data to produce an annual report slide deck and webinar available first to Sponsors and then posted on the website
- Combined with quarterly data to produce presentation materials for national and regional conferences
- Combined with quarterly data and market data to analyze the program’s impact and develop projections for short and long term planning
- Combined with quarterly data to convey trends in the home performance market to industry stakeholders

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY | Energy Efficiency &
Renewable Energy

For more information, visit:
energystar.gov/hpwes



March 2015