

## Michigan offers many programs to reduce greenhouse gases

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While climate negotiators wrap up their efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions this weekend in Copenhagen, Denmark, Michigan businesses, nonprofit agencies, school districts and cities can join the effort by participating in one of the state's voluntary programs to improve energy efficiency.

This week the state expanded its "green" certification program to theaters, museums, convention centers and similar facilities. Among the first to get certification were Grand Valley State University's L.V. Eberhard Center in Grand Rapids and the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The program is offered by the Bureau of Energy Systems in the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor, & Economic Growth. The Green Venues Michigan certification is modeled after the department's Green Lodging Michigan program for hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts. One aim of the programs is to encourage energy and resource conservation. The programs also focus on indoor and outdoor air pollution, solid waste reduction, purchasing and communication.

The idea is to increase the "green" aspects of public and private buildings. A lot of the savings comes from paying attention to energy and heating, landscaping, waste management and water use. In this time of dwindling budgets, any savings is important, but a savings that also reduces a building's "carbon footprint" in the community will become more and more important as national and global attention is focused on energy use.

The "green" certification might even become a tourism attraction, if unique energy savings programs are incorporated into buildings or landscaping.

The certification program is voluntary and nonregulatory. It involves a self-assessment process where a building is evaluated based on a checklist developed by the state. Depending on the level of certification being sought, a different number of requirements must be met.

The new Green Venues Michigan is one of several programs the state offers to help businesses, school districts, municipalities and nonprofits become more energy efficient. Others include Michigan Interfaith Power and Light, an ecumenical coalition of congregations and their partners who assist churches, synagogues and mosques with energy issues; and Rebuild Michigan, which assists local governments, schools, universities, nonprofit organizations and public housing authorities.

Nearly two dozen West Michigan school districts and communities have participated in Rebuild Michigan since 1999, when Grand Haven schools was the first from the area to participate. Using the program this year are Ferrysburg, Fremont, Manistee and Saugatuck. Mona Shores and

Muskegon schools participated in 2008.

They have taken advantage of energy audits and other technical assistance to reduce energy use and implement energy efficient operations.