



Shaping Tomorrow's Global  
Built Environment Today

## RESILIENCY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

### THE ISSUE

Resiliency in the built environment is a complex subject that involves many disciplines. As defined in the National Academy of Sciences report *Disaster Resilience: A National Imperative*, resiliency is "the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from and more successfully adapt to adverse events or threats." These events or threats may be financial, political, environmental, as well as disaster, conflict, cyber, climate, or health related. Its recent prominence is in part due to increasing concerns over the adequacy of responses to natural or climate-related events around the world, as well as recognition that many such events are likely to increase in frequency and severity.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. has sustained 400 weather and climate disasters since 1980 where overall damages/costs reached or exceeded \$1 billion (including CPI adjustment to 2024). The total cost of these 400 events exceeds \$2.785 trillion.<sup>2</sup>

Strengthening the built environment is vital to protecting the public when natural and human-induced events occur. Buildings often serve as the first line of defense and as a result, the built environment and engineered systems in buildings must become more resilient in how they are designed and operated to protect the public. A building's ability to recover and be available to occupants following such an event can have widespread economic and health implications. Additionally, as the built environment becomes more interconnected and operations shift towards automation, building systems will see increased vulnerability to cyber threats.

### ASHRAE's ROLE

It is ASHRAE's position that building design and operation must consider resiliency as part of an overall risk assessment and planning approach, and that major new efforts in research, education, standards and guidelines, and guidance documents are required to increase building resiliency. Building resiliency is of such importance that it has been identified as one of four key initiatives in the 2019-2024 ASHRAE Strategic Plan.

ASHRAE also has partnered with CIBSE to release a Joint Position Document on Resiliency in the Built Environment.<sup>3</sup> The two societies are committed to taking a leadership role with respect to building resiliency. ASHRAE will be developing and adopting designs, materials, components, systems, and processes that minimize the adverse impacts of extreme events and environmental changes over time.

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<sup>1</sup> IPCC. 2014. Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Geneva, Switzerland: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. [www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/](http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/).

<sup>2</sup> "Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Overview." National Climatic Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/>. Accessed 18 December 2024.

<sup>3</sup> ASHRAE & CIBSE. Position Document on Resiliency in the Built Environment". <https://www.ashrae.org/about/position-documents>

## **ASHRAE's VIEW**

Investing in building resiliency is crucial to saving lives, protecting public property, and reducing the financial strain of post-disaster recovery. For these reasons, ASHRAE sees the need for policy setting entities world-wide to encourage sound, balanced, and innovative actions to address long-range resiliency issues and the specific technical concerns associated with them.

When it comes to strengthening the built environment, building codes and standards, such as those developed by ASHRAE, make our communities more sustainable, more efficient and more resilient. According to a 2020 study released by FEMA, by adopting the most recent building codes, there is an impressive cost-benefit ratio of about \$11 for every \$1 invested towards hazard mitigation. Unfortunately, most jurisdictions have not yet adopted the most recent standards and codes that are based on the latest research and technological innovation. Legislators and other government officials should examine the best ways to assist these jurisdictions with the adoption, implementation and enforcement of the most recent building energy efficiency codes and standards, as high-efficiency buildings rely less on the grid and are thus more resilient. This will help provide a more sustainable future and improve the resilience of the built environment. ASHRAE is committed to being a resource for government with respect to building codes and standards and will continue to publish and maintain consensus-based building standards, guidelines, and Design Guides.

ASHRAE also holds the following positions with respect to resiliency in the built environment:

- Resiliency is an important societal, economical, and technical issue that has a major impact on the built environment as well as how engineered building systems are designed and operated.
- Technical solutions to these challenges are needed, including the application of emerging technologies. These solutions will include research, standard and guideline development, and the production of educational material.
- Policy setting entities need to encourage sound, balanced, and innovative actions to address the broad issues of resiliency and the specific technical concerns associated with them.
- Built environments need to be developed which are both resilient and sustainable.

ASHRAE also recommends that new and continuing research be conducted to guide resilient infrastructure, building systems and community designs. ASHRAE aims to continue collaborating on building resiliency research opportunities with external organizations, national and international government agencies, and foundations.