

DC's Shelters Are Going Green – and Improving Conditions for Residents

By **Catherine Plume** - January 16, 2018



Representatives from the DCSEU, DGS and DHS celebrate a more energy efficient Emery Shelter.

Whether you're a fan of Mayor Muriel Bowser or not, you can't deny that her administration is taking climate change seriously and working to reduce the District's carbon footprint. Now this greening effort is moving into DC's shelters. These facilities are being upgraded to be more energy efficient, provide a healthier environment for residents and save taxpayer money.

In late October, DC's Department of General Services (DGS), Department of Human Services (DHS) and the [DC Sustainable Energy Utility \(DCSEU\)](#) announced the completion of an energy efficiency upgrade at the Emery Shelter on Lincoln Road NE. The shelter provides housing for up to 100 homeless men who are employed or in job training.

According to Ted Trabue, managing director of the DCSEU, "With these upgrades, Emery's hallways are lit with bright light-emitting diode (LED) lights. New energy-efficient air-conditioners will provide cool air during the summer months while a new boiler will provide heat in the winter. We've also replaced water heaters with more energy efficient models."

This investment will pay off. The combined annual electricity and gas savings from the upgrades will reduce operating costs at the facility by more than \$30,000 per year while

providing a savings of some 180 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO²) annually. Upgrading just one of DC's 24 DHS/DGS jointly run shelters is the equivalent of taking 38 cars off the road for one year, according to the US [Environmental Protection Agency carbon calculator](#). Trabue notes, "Once you extrapolate this carbon emissions savings across all of DC's shelters, the carbon savings really begin to add up!"

According to Greer Johnson Gillis, director of DGS, the District is already replicating these upgrades across other shelters and buildings. "Our work at Emery represents just the first effort of this partnership. We're currently partnering with DHS and DCSEU on energy efficiency projects at the New York Avenue Shelter and the Blair House."

The project exemplifies how different government agencies and programs are collaborating to deploy an array of District-based resources to improve District-owned and -managed building stock. The lighting and equipment installations were completed by District-based certified business enterprises (CBEs).

Robert Saunders, a building manager at DGS responsible for the Emery Shelter, received a building operator certificate offered through a partnership between the University of the District of Columbia and DGS. The certificate is offered as a part of DCSEU's workforce development program. "The certificate helped me understand efficient HVAC operation and how to optimize energy use in my 24-hour-buildings. The Emery Shelter was a great initial project, especially because it is one of our oldest buildings," Saunders says about his experience.



The partnership between DHS, DGS and DCSEU has a four-year horizon, and during that time shelters across the District will be upgraded. While the energy efficiency and carbon savings are expected to be significant, the derived reduction in operational costs through energy efficient gas and electricity installations will enable the District to direct the money saved toward additional building upgrades and other services that benefit vulnerable residents. Most importantly, the upgrades will create a healthier indoor environment for shelter residents.

But, what is the DCSEU anyway? While DHS and DGS are relatively well-known agencies, residents tend to be less familiar with the DCSEU, a contractor to the Department of Energy &

Environment (DOEE). Created by legislation in 2011, the DCSEU helps residents and businesses use less energy and save money. Funding comes from the Sustainable Energy Trust Fund, which is financed by a surcharge on all electric and natural gas utility ratepayers in the District.

The DCSEU provides a wealth of rebates for energy efficiency upgrades, from the installation of improved thermostats to appliances such as washers, dryers and refrigerators to heating and cooling units and, of course, energy efficient lighting. And, as mentioned, through job skills development, on-the-job training, certifications and direct work experience, the DCSEU links residents who are new to the workforce, between jobs or looking for a career change with local contractors in the green economy.

[Check out the DCSEU](#) and see what sort of energy and cost savings you might qualify for – for your home or your DC-based business. Maybe you'll find that you can reduce your own carbon footprint, reduce your energy costs and live in a healthier business or work environment. After all, that's what green living is all about!

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