



AMERICA'S 50 GREENEST CITIES

Want to see a model for successful and rapid environmental action? Don't look to the federal government—check out your own town. Here, our list of the 50 communities that are leading the way. Does yours make the cut?

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In the international alliance to fight climate change, the United States is considered the sullen loner. But in the seven years since we rejected Kyoto, changes have begun. Not at the federal level, however. It's the locals who are making it happen.

In everything from emissions control to environmental stewardship, cities across the country are far ahead of the federal government, and they're achieving their successes with ready-made technology. Austin has pledged to meet 30 percent of its energy needs with renewable sources by 2020, aided by planned wind-power installations that will surpass their predecessors in efficiency. Seattle has retrofitted its municipal heavy-duty diesel vehicles with devices that will reduce particulate pollution by 50 percent. Boulder has enacted the country's first electricity tax to pay for greenhouse-gas emission reductions. Something about the comparative speed of city government—a city-council member can greenlight a project and be cutting the ribbon a year later—leads to bold action, and as cities trade ideas, a very positive sort of mimicry is spreading.



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The 10 trailblazing civic projects profiled in our list of the top green cities in America are among the most impressive success stories to date—examples of what's possible when elected officials and local business leaders back up their green visions with scientific know-how, clout and creative funding.

How the Rankings Work:

We used raw data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Geographic Society's Green Guide, which collected survey data and government statistics for American cities of over 100,000 people in more than 30 categories, including air quality, electricity use and transportation habits. We then compiled these statistics into four broad categories, each scored out of either 5 or 10 possible points. The sum of these four scores determines a city's place in the rankings. Our categories are:

- **Electricity (E; 10 points):** Cities score points for drawing their energy from renewable sources such as wind, solar, biomass and hydroelectric power, as well as for offering incentives for residents to invest in their own power sources, like roof-mounted solar panels.
 - **Transportation (T; 10 points):** High scores go to cities whose commuters take public transportation or carpool. Air quality also plays a role.
 - **Green living (G; 5 points):** Cities earn points for the number of buildings certified by the U.S. Green Building Council, as well as for devoting area to green space, such as public parks and nature preserves.
 - **Recycling and green perspective (R; 5 points):** This measures how comprehensive a city's recycling program is (if the city collects old electronics, for example) and how important its citizens consider environmental issues.
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1. Portland, Ore. 23.1

- **Electricity:** 7.1 **Transportation:** 6.4 **Green Living:** 4.8 **Recycling/Perspective:** 4.8
America's top green city has it all: Half its power comes from renewable sources, a quarter of the workforce commutes by bike, carpool or public transportation, and it has 35 buildings certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

2. San Francisco, Calif. 23.0

- **Electricity:** 6.8 **Transportation:** 8.8 **Green Living:** 3.5 **Recycling/Perspective:** 3.9
See how San Francisco turns wasted roof space into power, [here](#).

3. Boston, Mass. 22.7

- **Electricity:** 5.7 **Transportation:** 8.7 **Green Living:** 3.4 **Recycling/Perspective:** 4.9
- **CASE STUDY: Grass Power**

Boston has preliminary plans for a plant that would turn 50,000 tons of fall color into power and fertilizer. The facility would first separate yard clippings into grass and leaves. Anaerobic bacteria feeding on the grass would make enough methane to power at least 1.5 megawatts' worth of generators, while heat and agitation would hasten the breakdown of leaves and twigs into compost.

4. Oakland, Calif. 22.5

- **Electricity:** 7.0 **Transportation:** 7.5 **Green Living:** 3.1 **Recycling/Perspective:** 4.9
See how Oakland's hydrogen-powered transit helps the city cut pollution, [here](#).

5. Eugene, Ore. 22.4

- **Electricity:** 10.0 **Transportation:** 4.7 **Green Living:** 2.9 **Recycling/Perspective:** 4.8
- **CATEGORY LEADER: Electricity**

Much of the wet Pacific Northwest draws its energy from hydroelectric dams. But Eugene draws an additional 9 percent of its municipal electricity from wind farms. It also buys back excess power from residents who install solar panels.

6. Cambridge, Mass. 22.2

- Electricity: 6.1 Transportation: 7.5 Green Living: 3.9 Recycling/Perspective: 4.7

7. Berkeley, Calif. 22.2

- Electricity: 6.2 Transportation: 8.4 Green Living: 2.9 Recycling/Perspective: 4.7

8. Seattle, Wash. 22.1

- Electricity: 6.2 Transportation: 7.3 Green Living: 4.7 Recycling/Perspective: 3.9

9. Chicago, Ill. 21.3

- Electricity: 5.4 Transportation: 7.3 Green Living: 5.0 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6
- **CATEGORY LEADER: Green Space**

In addition to the 12,000 acres Chicago has devoted to public parks and waterfront space, the U.S. Green Building Council has awarded four city projects with a "Platinum" rating, its highest award.

See how Chicago's power plants produce twice the energy with a third the carbon, [here](#).

10. Austin, Tex. 21.0

- Electricity: 6.9 Transportation: 5.9 Green Living: 3.3 Recycling/Perspective: 4.9

11. Minneapolis, Minn. 20.3

- Electricity: 7.8 Transportation: 7.4 Green Living: 2.8 Recycling/Perspective: 2.3
- **CASE STUDY: Citizen Enviro-Grants**

If you've got a world-saving idea, the City of Lakes will give you, your church or your community group the money to get it done. Twenty \$1,000 mini-grants and five \$10,000 awards were distributed last year to programs ranging from household power-consumption monitors to "block club talks" about global warming. A similar initiative has sprung up in Seattle.

12. St. Paul, Minn. 20.2

- Electricity: 8.0 Transportation: 4.0 Green Living: 3.5 Recycling/Perspective: 4.7

13. Sunnyvale, Calif. 19.9

- Electricity: 7.3 Transportation: 6.8 Green Living: 2.2 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

14. Honolulu, Hawaii 19.9

- Electricity: 6.0 Transportation: 7.8 Green Living: 2.6 Recycling/Perspective: 3.5

15. Fort Worth, Tex. 19.7

- Electricity: 8.3 Transportation: 4.6 Green Living: 2.4 Recycling/Perspective: 4.4

16. Albuquerque, N.M. 19.1

- Electricity: 7.6 Transportation: 5.5 Green Living: 2.4 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

17. Syracuse, N.Y. 18.9

- Electricity: 7.0 Transportation: 4.9 Green Living: 2.6 Recycling/Perspective: 4.4

18. Huntsville, Ala. 18.4

- Electricity: 6.2 Transportation: 4.1 Green Living: 3.6 Recycling/Perspective: 4.5

19. Denver, Colo. 18.2

- Electricity: 5.9 Transportation: 5.2 Green Living: 3.0 Recycling/Perspective: 4.1
- **CASE STUDY: Green Concrete**

Fly ash, a by-product of coal-burning power plants, usually ends up in landfills. Researchers at the University of Colorado Denver found a way to reuse this industrial by-product. They add it at concentrations of about 20 percent to a new green concrete mix. The addition of fly ash also reduces the amount of sulfur- and carbon-spewing concrete production needed to finish a job. The mayor has signed an executive order requiring the use of green concrete in new city projects, and a \$550-million infrastructure bond makes demand for the mix likely to grow.

20. New York, N.Y. 18.2

- Electricity: 2.8 Transportation: 10.0 Green Living: 3.4 Recycling/Perspective: 2.0
- **CATEGORY LEADER: Transportation**

More than 54 percent of New Yorkers take public transportation to work, beating the next-best metropolis, Washington, D.C., by 17 percent.

See how New York City turns its tides into electricity, [here](#).

21. Irvine, Calif. 18.1

- Electricity: 4.2 Transportation: 6.8 Green Living: 2.9 Recycling/Perspective: 4.2

22. Milwaukee, Wis. 17.3

- Electricity: 5.0 Transportation: 4.9 Green Living: 3.1 Recycling/Perspective: 4.3

23. Santa Rosa, Calif. 17.2

- Electricity: 7.0 Transportation: 3.4 Green Living: 2.4 Recycling/Perspective: 4.4

See how Santa Rosa taps geysers for watts, [here](#).

24. Ann Arbor, Mich. 17.2

- Electricity: 4.6 Transportation: 4.8 Green Living: 2.9 Recycling/Perspective: 4.9

25. Lexington, Ky. 16.8

- Electricity: 5.9 Transportation: 3.6 Green Living: 2.3 Recycling/Perspective: 5.0
- **CATEGORY LEADER: Recycling and green perspective**

Lexingtonians recycle everything from surplus electronics to scrap metal, and they listed the environment as their third most important concern (behind only employment and public safety)—the highest ranking in our survey.

26. Tulsa, Okla. 16.7

- Electricity: 5.0 Transportation: 3.9 Green Living: 3.4 Recycling/Perspective: 4.4

27. Rochester, N.Y. 16.1

- Electricity: 4.5 Transportation: 4.4 Green Living: 3.1 Recycling/Perspective: 4.1

28. Riverside, Calif. 16.0

- Electricity: 7.5 Transportation: 3.1 Green Living: 2.1 Recycling/Perspective: 3.3

29. Springfield, Ill. 15.7

- Electricity: 5.3 Transportation: 3.0 Green Living: 3.2 Recycling/Perspective: 4.2

30. Alexandria, Va. 15.7

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 6.3 Green Living: 3.1 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

31. St. Louis, Mo. 15.0

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 5.0 Green Living: 3.7 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

32. Anchorage, Alaska 14.4

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 4.7 Green Living: 2.1 Recycling/Perspective: 4.9
- **CASE STUDY: Power-Saving Streetlights**

Since Anchorage spends a good part of the year buried under highly reflective snow, it doesn't make sense to keep the street lamps at full bore when moonlight can do the job. The fix? Install citywide dimmers. On top of that, the city is planning to upgrade its 16,000 streetlamps to either LED or induction bulbs, depending on the results of computer simulations designed to find the type of light that helps humans see best and disturbs wildlife the least. The swap should be complete by year's end, and the initial \$5-million investment is expected to save up to \$3 million in energy costs annually.

33. Athens-Clarke, Ga. 14.1

- Electricity: 2.4 Transportation: 4.7 Green Living: 3.2 Recycling/Perspective: 3.8

34. Amarillo, Tex. 14.0

- Electricity: 5.2 Transportation: 2.9 Green Living: 2.3 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

35. Kansas City, Mo. 13.8

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 3.7 Green Living: 2.7 Recycling/Perspective: 4.7

36. Salt Lake City, Utah 13.5

- Electricity: 3.6 Transportation: 4.1 Green Living: 2.3 Recycling/Perspective: 3.5
- *See how Salt Lake City heats homes from waste, [here](#).*

37. Pasadena, Calif. 13.2

- Electricity: 5.8 Transportation: 3.1 Green Living: 1.8 Recycling/Perspective: 2.5

38. Norwalk, Calif. 13.0

- Electricity: 3.5 Transportation: 3.1 Green Living: 2.5 Recycling/Perspective: 3.9

39. Laredo, Tex. 12.9

- Electricity: 4.4 Transportation: 2.5 Green Living: 1.7 Recycling/Perspective: 4.3

40. Joliet, Ill. 12.0

- Electricity: 1.3 Transportation: 4.3 Green Living: 2.6 Recycling/Perspective: 3.8

41. Newport News, Va. 11.9

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 2.7 Green Living: 2.7 Recycling/Perspective: 3.8

42. Louisville, Ky. 11.9

- Electricity: 1.3 Transportation: 4.0 Green Living: 2.5 Recycling/Perspective: 4.1

43. Concord, Calif. 11.9

- Electricity: 3.0 Transportation: 3.2 Green Living: 2.2 Recycling/Perspective: 3.5

44. Fremont, Calif. 11.3

- Electricity: 3.0 Transportation: 3.0 Green Living: 1.5 Recycling/Perspective: 3.8

45. Elizabeth, N.J. 10.5

- Electricity: 2.6 Transportation: 2.8 Green Living: 1.8 Recycling/Perspective: 3.3

46. Livonia, Mich. 10.2

- Electricity: 2.7 Transportation: 2.1 Green Living: 1.8 Recycling/Perspective: 3.6

47. San Bernardino, Calif. 10.2

- Electricity: 2.8 Transportation: 2.3 Green Living: 1.6 Recycling/Perspective: 3.5

48. Thousand Oaks, Calif. 10.2

- Electricity: 2.9 Transportation: 2.9 Green Living: 1.6 Recycling/Perspective: 2.8

49. Stockton, Calif. 10.1

- Electricity: 2.8 Transportation: 2.5 Green Living: 1.0 Recycling/Perspective: 3.8

50. Greensboro, N.C. 10.0

- Electricity: 2.0 Transportation: 2.0 Green Living: 2.1 Recycling/Perspective: 3.9

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