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Washington first state with green building standards

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OLYMPIA, Wash. -- Gov. Christine Gregoire signed a green buildings bill into law Friday, making Washington the first state to require that new, public buildings meet environmental standards.

"With this bill, Washington state is taking the lead to build schools and other state buildings that do a much better job of protecting Washington's air, land and water," Gregoire said at a signing ceremony at Washington Middle School.

A remodeling project at the school will meet the green building standards, which include energy efficiency and water conservation guidelines.

The law requires major public agency facilities larger than 5,000 square feet, including school buildings receiving state funding, to meet the standards.

Rep. Hans Dunshee, D-Snohomish, sponsored the bill in the House.

"In a few years we'll be able to walk into a school that is fundamentally different and better than the schools we went to," he said Friday.

The green buildings reduce utility costs, increase employee productivity, reduce absenteeism and in schools, improve student test scores, according to the U.S. Green Building Council, the national organization that introduced the standards.

The Olympia School District estimates that by using the green building standards, Washington Middle School will save more than 500,000 gallons of water each year and provide healthier air quality in classrooms, according to a news release from the governor's office.

The use of natural ventilation instead of air conditioning will save the district \$1,200 each year. It will save an additional \$25,000 over 30 years in energy savings by using natural lighting.