

Portland, Oregon: The Greenest City in US

Half of Portland's 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.

Portland's commitment to creating a healthy, sustainable city runs so deep that the Portland Visitors Association makes fun of the issue in its marketing motto: "It's Not Easy Being Green." It is no wonder other cities look to it for leadership and inspiration.



Once more in 2008, Portland reached the top spot as the greenest city in the U.S., according to a ranking of the nation's 50 most-populous cities by SustainLane, an online guide to news and products related to sustainable living. In ranking the cities, SustainLane looked at sixteen factors, including transportation options, air quality, roadway congestion, tap water quality, housing affordability, solid waste diversion and local food availability.

If you live in Portland, you might want to think twice before complaining about the 40-plus inches of rain dumped on your head every year. It might be the only thing keeping the entire country from moving to your city by the Prius-load.

Portland retained its title as SustainLane's number one city to beat in 2008 as well as 2007 – not surprising given that it got a 30-year jump on the rest of the country. That's right: city-planners in Portland have been thinking green since the 70s, when the rest of the country was still embracing the strip mall.

The city enacted strict land-use policies, implementing an urban growth boundary, requiring density, and setting a strong precedent for sustainable development. The city's natural beauty is hard to beat, too. But Portlanders aren't resting on their laurels. According to the city's sustainable development director, Portland aims to be a "20 Minute City" -- where residents spend 20 or less minutes traveling from home to work, shop or play.

"Portland's support of local farmers and farmers' markets; its explosion of green buildings and commitment to renewable energy, and its emphasis on mass transportation, including light rail and bicycles, shows that a city can not only be kind to the earth, but also flourish economically and grow by being green," said Mayor Tom Potter.



The SustainLane US City Rankings focus on the many ways city policies and practices differ from one another and how that affects the people living in those places. Portland, captured the top spot with an all-around good to great performance in most every category analyzed. Ranked below average only in affordability, natural disaster risk and water supply, Portland excels in clean technology and green building development, overall quality of life, and in sustainability planning and management.

How did Portland get the top spot? More now than ever, people in the city identify with having a high quality of life. They work hard at being involved in city policy, boards, projects and practices that impact sustainability.

Mayor Potter said: "We're definitely proud to be recognized by SustainLane for all the ways Portland's citizens and businesses are working together to create a more sustainable community. In Portland, the local governments are leaders for sustainability but it's really the grassroots actions from the neighborhoods and the businesses that make this a special place. The City is buying renewable power and conserving energy, and so are tens of thousands of residents. The City has a green building policy, but it's the builders and developers and buyers who actually change the market. It's the people who shop at the farmers markets, the growers who manage their farms sustainably, the folks who choose to bike or take the bus to work, and all those day-to-day decisions that are making a huge difference."



Portland continues to use its sustainability ethos to attract businesses, residents, tourists and conventions. The city has ever-increasing currency as one of the capitals of a powerful emerging domestic economy.

Other cities are forging ahead as well, each a leader in some form of sustainability. These include Chicago and San Francisco in renewable energy and urban greening; Boston, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and Oakland in local food development; Denver, Charlotte, Phoenix and Dallas in citywide transit oriented development; Atlanta and Washington DC in green building.

Portland green facts

- Oregon introduced the first bottle bill in the United States in 1971.
- Portlanders recycled 54 percent of their waste in 2001, more than any other U.S. city.
- Portland is home to the nation's largest urban wilderness — the 5,000-acre Forest Park.
 - More than 5,000 Portlanders commute to work by bicycle.
- Portland's Airport MAX light rail is the only train-to-plane option on the West Coast.
(Realtorinpdx.com)

Top 10 US Sustainable City (2008)

1. Portland, OR
2. San Francisco, CA
3. Seattle, WA
4. Chicago, IL
5. New York, NY
6. Boston, MA
7. Minneapolis, MN
8. Philadelphia, PA
9. Oakland, CA
10. Baltimore, MD

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