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Roxbury mosque is first Islamic center in US to receive Energy Star

Posted by Matt Rocheleau June 26, 2011 01:00 PM

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(Michael Paulson/Globe file/ June 2009)

The Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury Crossing.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A Roxbury mosque became the first Islamic center in the country to receive a federal environmental label indicating the facility's energy performance is better than at least 75 percent of similar buildings nationwide.

The [Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center](#) was among four New England congregations recognized this week for earning the Energy Star Label within the past year, officials said.

Since Energy Star-labeling of congregations began two years ago, [19 congregations nationwide](#) have received the distinction, five of which are in New England, according to program officials. [Last June](#), the [First Parish](#) in Needham became the first congregation in the region to receive the label.

The other three congregations in New England that earned the label in the past year were: the [Dennis Union Church](#) in Dennis, the [Winchester Unitarian Society](#) in Winchester and [New England Pentecostal](#) in Pelham, New Hampshire.

Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy.

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"These congregations are setting a solid example of financial and environmental stewardship. They have successfully reduced their energy use and are showing all houses of worship across New England that environmental stewardship is possible for all sorts of organizations," regional administrator of the EPA's New England office Curt Spalding said in a press release. "We hope more small businesses and congregations will follow their lead and maximize energy efficiency opportunities in their own operations."

The approximately 70,000 square-foot Islamic center [opened](#) in Roxbury Crossing amid community tension two years ago.

Officials said the mosque became a partner of Energy Star one year ago and earned a score of 92 out of 100 on the EPA's energy performance scale.

"Jawad Benazzi, the facility manager, spearheaded the center's energy efficiency initiative, purchasing energy efficient appliances in the kitchen and offices and putting signage in areas such as bathrooms and classroom to remind members to conserve whenever possible," said the EPA release.

"The center had electrical and gas audits conducted by their local utility for free and that helped them to identify energy saving opportunities," the release continued. "This led to upgrading more than 70 percent of their interior lights. Other improvements included adding motion detectors in bathrooms, and putting reducers on the bathroom faucets to save on water and energy."

Other buildings – such as hotels, retail stores, and offices across the country – have been eligible for an Energy Star label since 1999. More than 14,500 buildings have received the label.

A different distinction than the Energy Star label, the "Energy Star Congregation Award" is also given out to qualifying congregations each year.

"This award is given to a select few congregations that demonstrate an outstanding commitment to energy efficiency across all levels of their organization," EPA officials said in an e-mail.

Whereas the label is based on an energy performance rating that is "validated by a professional engineer or licensed architect" and is therefore an "objective, performance-based" measure; the award is "subjective" and "merit-based," officials added.

The award program began in 1999. Through last year, [46 congregations](#) have won the honor, the agency said. The 2011 awards have not been announced yet.

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Below, see what the EPA had to say about the other three New England congregations that received the Energy Star Label in the past year:

Dennis Union Church, Dennis, Mass. (EPA score: 96 of 100)

"Dennis Union Church was able to add 5,000 square feet of new space, renovate and add central air conditioning to their facility and still lower their annual energy bills. The Church used rebates from local and technical support from Energy Star to reduce their energy use. Even with the addition of 5,000 square feet of space, an increase of more than 40% in the size of their facilities, Dennis Union Church is saving 1,308 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity annually and has reduced their overall electric bill by \$262. In total, this represents a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of nearly one ton. All

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four congregations, with the help of their dedicated congregants, made substantial efforts to mitigate their environmental impact, while at the same time reducing the cost of energy for the congregations."

Winchester Unitarian Society, Winchester, Mass. (EPA score: 81 of 100)

"With an initial investment of just \$7,000, we have made significant gains in energy efficiency and cut our heating bills by more than half. Our success is proof that a congregation – even one with an older building like ours – doesn't need to spend a lot to make meaningful reductions in its carbon footprint,' says Chuck Khuen, co-chair of the Winchester Unitarian Society's Building Committee. After a full assessment of the building and its heating system, the church tuned and repaired their heating system and vents, weather stripped windows and doors, added heating zones in the building to reduce energy use during off-peak hours. The improvements paid for themselves in the first year, substantially reducing the congregation's carbon emissions and freeing funds for uses directly supportive of the congregation's mission and vision. 'What we've done so far is just the beginning,' remarks Khuen, 'and EPA continues to provide us with ideas and inspiration through the Congregations program and other resources. We look forward to earning our next Energy Star.'"

New England Pentecostal Ministries, Pelham, N.H. (EPA score: 86 of 100)

"New England Pentecostal Ministries made many changes to earn the Energy Star label including replacing old toilets to save water, adding energy efficient windows, insulating hot water pipes, adding insulation to the building, weather stripping the doors, purchasing high efficiency heat/air conditioning units, and adding timers on all outdoor lights. 'As an Energy Star congregation, we are committed to do all that we can to find ways to encourage our congregation to actively find ways to reduce energy. I really feel that this program will challenge each congregant to do their part in boosting our rating for the next Energy Star Label,' said NEP's Pastor Ruth Choate."

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(Travis Dove / Globe file)

Inside the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury.

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