

Housing Starts Crash, Solar Beats Coal, and a Startup Wants to Make It Rain

This week, housing starts hit a six-year low, solar generates more electricity than coal for the first time, a startup claims it can make it rain, and researchers test earthquake-resistant mass timber buildings. Here's what you need to know.

New data shows housing starts fell 15.4% in May, reaching their lowest level in six years. Single-family construction also dropped to an eight-month low as builders continue to face high mortgage rates, labor shortages, and rising construction costs. The housing industry can't solve the affordability crisis without building more homes. And right now, the numbers are moving in the wrong direction.

<https://www.reuters.com/business/us-single-family-housing-starts-drop-eight-month-low-may-2026-06-16/>?

Here's a milestone few people saw coming this quickly: in May, solar generated more electricity in the U.S. than coal for the first time ever. According to energy think tank Ember, solar supplied 12.8% of U.S. electricity, while coal fell to 12.2%. The shift comes as utilities race to add new power sources to meet growing demand, especially from AI data centers. Solar generation jumped 17% from a year ago, and when paired with battery storage, it's becoming one of the fastest and most affordable ways to bring new power online. Coal isn't going away anytime soon, but this marks another sign that America's energy transition is accelerating.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2026-06-10/solar-surpasses-coal-in-historic-shift-for-us-electricity-mix?>

Climate goals are getting harder to fake. A major update from the Science Based Targets Initiative could change how companies measure climate progress. For years, businesses have focused on setting ambitious net-zero goals decades into the future. The new standard shifts attention to something more immediate: proving that climate action is actually being built into operations, supply chains, and business decisions today. The updated guidance still supports ambitious emissions reductions, but places greater emphasis on implementation, transparency, and measurable progress along the way.

<https://time.com/article/2026/06/12/sbti-corporate-climate-progress/>

Building codes don't usually make headlines—until something goes wrong. That's why a provision in North Carolina's Farm Act is drawing attention. The legislation would exempt agricultural buildings, including fertilizer facilities, from local zoning and state building code oversight. Supporters say the change could reduce red tape and speed

agricultural development. Critics argue it removes important safety safeguards, especially in the wake of incidents like the 2022 Winston Weaver fertilizer plant fire that forced thousands of residents to evacuate. As communities face increasing risks from extreme weather, industrial hazards, and aging infrastructure, we have to ask: How much regulation is enough to protect the public while still encouraging growth? The legislation awaits Governor Josh Stein's signature.

[Legislative Reporting Service on the North Carolina General Assembly.](#)

One of the biggest constraints on housing growth in the American West is water. That's why a startup is testing a rain-enhancement technology in Colorado and Utah. The solar-powered system releases electrically charged particles into the atmosphere to help clouds produce more rainfall. The company claims it can increase precipitation by 10% or more, though scientists say the evidence remains preliminary. This is an important innovation because water availability increasingly determines where communities can grow, how many homes can be built, and how resilient those communities will be over time.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2026-06-11/us-west-drought-spurs-startup-to-pitch-weird-rain-machine?>

When we think about earthquake-resistant buildings, the goal is usually simple: don't collapse. But researchers in New Zealand are asking a bigger question: What if buildings could not only survive an earthquake, but quickly return to service afterward? In a recent full-scale shake table test, engineers evaluated a modular building made from cross-laminated timber, or CLT. The structure was designed to move in a controlled way during an earthquake, absorbing energy and then returning to its original position once the shaking stopped. The result? The building remained undamaged and self-centered after a series of simulated earthquakes. The research highlights the growing potential of mass timber to deliver both sustainability and resilience—two priorities that are becoming increasingly important as communities face climate challenges and natural disasters.

<https://techxplore.com/news/2026-06-resilient-earthquakes-solution.html>

Two stories this week highlight a growing need in the building industry: better tools and better training. HomeRES.ai was recognized by Fast Company's 2026 World Changing Ideas Awards for helping contractors connect homeowners with incentives, rebates, and building science solutions that make resilient home upgrades more affordable and easier to scale across entire neighborhoods. Meanwhile, USGBC and IFC have launched a new certificate program called Designing for Greater Efficiency, aimed at helping architects, builders, and other professionals learn the fundamentals of

energy-efficient and resource-efficient building design. Together, these efforts point to an important reality: building better homes requires both the knowledge and the tools to put that knowledge into practice.

<https://www.usgbc.org/articles/designing-greater-efficiency-certificate-now-available-through-usgbc>

[HomeRES.ai](#)

Greensboro recently completed its \$54 million Downtown Greenway, a four-mile loop that connects neighborhoods, parks, businesses, and public spaces throughout the city. The project manages stormwater, reduces flooding, restores streams, supports pollinators, and creates safer routes for walking and biking. The greenway includes more than 175 bioswales, rain gardens, and other green infrastructure features that help clean water and improve resilience while making the city more enjoyable to navigate. Why does this matter for housing? Because people don't just buy homes. They buy access—to parks, trails, schools, shopping, nature, and community. Infrastructure like this increases quality of life and makes neighborhoods more desirable places to live. The full story is on our website or click the link in our show notes.

<https://www.greenbuildermedia.com/blog/the-case-for-visible-infrastructure>

Iowa is facing a growing water quality crisis, and some of the state's most respected farmers say it's time for a new approach. A group known as the "Lobe Rangers"—three corn and soybean farmers—are calling for stronger policies to reduce fertilizer runoff contaminating rivers, lakes, and drinking water supplies. The farmers argue that Iowa's voluntary conservation strategy isn't working fast enough. The state's goal is to cut nutrient pollution by 45% by 2035, but key practices like cover crops remain far below the levels needed to make a meaningful impact. Their message is simple: if Iowa wants cleaner water, it will take stronger incentives to drive change.

<https://insideclimateneews.org/news/07062026/iowa-farmers-talk-regulation-amid-water-crisis/>

As hurricane and wildfire season begins, questions are growing about whether FEMA is ready. A new report argues that leadership vacancies, staffing reductions, and slower disaster aid approvals have left the agency less prepared than in previous years. Critics point to vacant leadership positions and cuts to FEMA's disaster workforce as potential risks if major storms or wildfires strike. At the same time, the federal government is shifting more responsibility for disaster preparedness and response to state and local governments. Whether that leads to greater efficiency—or fewer resources when disasters hit—remains to be seen.

<https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/news/fema-ready-disaster-season/822507/>

This week on *The Valuation Metric*, Sara Gutterman sits down with Doug Tarry, president of Doug Tarry Homes and one of Canada's leading advocates for high-performance housing. This is a conversation about what happens when housing becomes too transactional, why homes should be designed around human well-being instead of price per square foot, and whether builders have a responsibility to create communities—not just houses. Doug shares lessons from decades of homebuilding, rebuilding after Hurricane Maria, and developing net-zero communities that prioritize resilience, nature, and connection. You can watch the full video here on The Green Builder Media Network. Here's a clip.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSjib52smKs&t=5s>

IAPMO has published the 2027 editions of the Uniform Plumbing Code and Uniform Mechanical Code, introducing updates for everything from tankless water heaters and graywater systems to EV charging ventilation, district energy systems, and hydrogen fuel gas piping. The new codes also include expanded guidance on water quality, Legionella prevention, and building resilience, reflecting the growing complexity of modern buildings. These updates offer an early look at the technologies and best practices likely to shape the next generation of homes and buildings.

<https://iapmostore.org/>

Our editors' product pick this week is the brand-new Rheem Endeavor Line Classic Plus Series Top-Discharge Universal Heat Pump. The ENERGY STAR-certified system offers up to 17 SEER2 cooling efficiency, qualifies as a cold-climate heat pump, and features variable-speed operation for improved comfort, humidity control, and energy savings. Its universal compatibility with nearly any R-454B HVAC system also makes it an attractive option for both replacement projects and new construction.

<https://www.rheem.com/endeavor/>