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Allegheny Power launches program to make homes energy-efficient



Rick Stouffer

Allegheny Power has teamed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to offer its 700,000 Pennsylvania customers energy-efficient ways to earn monetary incentives ranging from \$200 to \$1,000, and an Energy Star label.

The PA Home Energy program is one of a number of new Allegheny Power programs designed to get customers involved with saving kilowatts and money.

One of the programs will involve automated power meters, so-called smart meters, set for introduction in a pilot program before year's end. A smart meter shows customers exactly how much power is being used and what electricity costs at a given time, allowing usage to be adapted to when prices are lowest.

"It's our intent to offer smart metering in a pilot program in Pennsylvania fairly soon, before the end of the year," said Allegheny Power President David Flitman. He couldn't offer details until the program gains approval from the state Public Utility Commission.

The PA Home Energy program was rolled out Friday at a news conference at Waynesburg College in Waynesburg. It's designed to link homeowners with trained and certified energy consultants and contractors who can provide services to help reduce energy usage in new construction and older homes.

Houses that pass what's considered a rigorous program to reduce greenhouse gases via energy efficiency will be rewarded with the ubiquitous Energy Star label, familiar to anyone who within the last decade has purchased a new appliance.

"Homeowners could receive \$200 for a 20 percent energy savings, up to \$1,000 for up to a 50 percent savings in energy," said Greg Thomas, president of Performance Systems Development Inc., an Ithaca, N.Y.-based company that develops, implements and evaluates energy-related marketing programs.

Other participants in PA Home Energy include the West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund, which is contributing \$1 million through 2008 to fund the program, and Waynesburg-based Affordable Comfort Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides conferences promoting energy efficiency.

Nationally, in 2006, some 200,000 homes, 12 percent of all home starts, carried the EPA's Energy Star, said David Lee, director of the agency's Energy Star New and Existing Homes program. Only 1.5 percent of starts in Pennsylvania last year, about 375 homes, carried the Energy Star logo.

"To carry the Energy Star, an appliance, a home must be at least 15 percent more energy-efficient than products manufactured to code," Lee said. That percentage can mean \$200 to \$400 in savings annually from heating and cooling, according to the EPA. "The average increase in cost to implement Energy Star requirements in a new home is about \$2,100."

Allegheny Power's energy efficiency-conservation push not only helps its customers save money and power that can be sold elsewhere, it helps the power delivery arm of Allegheny Energy Inc. meet Gov. Ed Rendell's Energy Independence Strategy which, if implemented, would require power providers to implement conservation before building power plants.

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