

Note: SWEEP staff contributed to the following editorial in support of energy efficiency policies that SWEEP advocates in Nevada.



Rick Van Diepen: NV Energy should expand conservation programs

Reno Gazette-Journal
May 19, 2010

By Rick Van Diepen

NV Energy should not cut back on energy-conservation programs when customers need them most.

What if you could afford to buy a house but couldn't afford to live in it? These days, it's not so hard to imagine. Last year, NV Energy reported a 17-percent increase in power shutoffs. People just couldn't afford their power bills.

That's why I'm disappointed to hear that NV Energy is backing away from promises it made last year to save its customers energy and money through energy efficiency. NV Energy's efficiency investments have a proven track record of reducing energy waste. Its rebates and incentives fund improvements that reduce utility bills and the operational costs for businesses. But in its latest three-year plan, the utility is proposing 47-percent reductions in those programs compared to what it proposed last July. To best serve its customers and Nevada's energy future, NV Energy should be doing everything it can to help customers slash energy waste and save money.

Just a few weeks ago, Habitat for Humanity Las Vegas unveiled the first two LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environment Design) platinum-rated affordable homes in Nevada. I was the designer. Using off-the-shelf technology and making only minor tweaks to standard building methods, those homes were made to be twice as energy-efficient as comparable production homes, making them not just affordable to purchase, but also to operate as well. That's the true meaning of the term "affordable housing."

If a nonprofit builder of affordable housing can do it, why can't everybody? Nevadans have never liked waste, and in a time of 13 percent statewide unemployment and a looming \$2.5 billion deficit over the next biennium, the time is ripe to consider why we waste nearly \$1 billion annually in energy costs.

Many homes and buildings in Nevada -- even newer ones -- lack proper insulation and have leaky windows and inefficient heating and cooling systems. Improving building efficiency reduces energy waste, lowers utility bills and puts money back into budgets. Energy-efficient homes and businesses are cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter, and increase health, comfort and productivity for occupants.

With more than 20 existing incentive programs, NV Energy should be applauded for what it has done so far to promote efficiency. At the same time, we customers, along with state regulators, should encourage NV Energy to expand on the programs that work.

It is much less expensive to significantly increase energy efficiency incentive programs than it is to build new power plants and power lines. It would be short-sighted to scale back programs that help lower energy use and costs for all NV Energy customers in the long run.

NV Energy's residential and business customers must make their voices heard to encourage the continuation and expansion of these important programs, which benefit our bottom line and the environment at the same time.

Rick Van Diepen is a senior associate at PGAL Architects in Las Vegas. He is president of the U.S. Green Building Council Nevada Chapter and a board member of Nevadans for Clean and Reliable Energy.

Reno Gazette-Journal

May 19, 2010

<http://www.rgj.com/article/20100519/OPED04/5190411>