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Cut energy use, reap rewards

Governor's report estimates savings from efficiency recommendations would be worth \$7.1 billion over next eight years

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A governor's report released Tuesday shows billions of dollars in economic rewards are within the state's reach if government, residents and business adopt energy-saving steps that are technically, socially and economically feasible right now.

The analysis comes a week after Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr.'s Blue Ribbon Advisory Council on Climate Change issued a grim global warming report along with a host of suggestions for change. Unlike the earlier report, however, the Utah Energy Efficiency Strategy findings include cost-benefit analyses and details on how to put the measures into play.

The governor's goal is to see a 20 percent reduction in energy use by 2015, with 2005 the baseline year. The report estimates the savings from 23 separate efficiency recommendations would be worth \$7.1 billion over the next eight years.

"One of the most important investments we can [make] is energy efficiency," Dianne Nielsen, Huntsman's energy policy adviser and former executive director of the state Department of Environmental Quality said during an afternoon news conference.

The goal is the most ambitious efficiency initiative of any U.S. governor, said report co-author Howard Geller of the Boulder, Colo.-based Southwest Energy Efficiency Project.

"This is a huge step toward our largest untapped [energy] resource," added Sarah Wright, report co-author and executive director of Utah Clean Energy. "We can mine it and develop it just like any other resource in the state."

The Energy Efficiency Strategy would save electricity, natural gas, vehicle fuels and other petroleum products. The report took into account about 85 percent of all Utah's energy use, but didn't look at jet fuel use, liquefied petroleum gas or industries' use of direct coal-burning.

The calculations assumed the state population would continue to grow but shows how residents could reduce the number of miles traveled each year and assumed increased use of energy-efficient appliances and vehicles.

The report also included a number of case studies, such as Moroni Feed Company's decision to upgrade and retrofit its condensers and compressors at its processing plant, Utah Indoor Soccer's switch to higher-efficiency lighting and Kennecott Land's energy-efficient Daybreak housing development on the west side of the Salt Lake Valley.

A particularly innovative approach by Sapp Brothers Travel Center in Salt Lake City shows how company executives who pay attention to energy news can get ahead of the game.

The travel center near Interstate 215 and 1300 South has contracted with IdleAire Technologies of Knoxville, Tenn., to install electric ports over 51 of the Sapp Brothers' parking spaces. The ports allow truckers to turn off their engines but still have all the comforts of heat, air conditioning, television and other amenities their diesel engines allowed.

While that means Sapp Brothers might sell less fuel, the company gets a cut of the concession's proceeds, said travel center manager Mark Stevenson.

Company executives, already seeing cities and states in the East and South clamping down on truck idling time-limit laws, signed the contract with IdleAire in 2001. "Cleaning up the environment was a big part of the decision," Stevenson said.

After getting 80 percent of the \$850,000 start-up cost from the Utah Department of Transportation, the operation began in May and already has set records for use, Stevenson said. The Energy Strategy report estimates the project will save 175,000 gallons of diesel worth \$580,000 annually for a total of \$6.3 million after 15 years.

Whether all or any of the report's recommendations will become reality is still a big unknown.

And while the report also showed the energy efficiencies would mean the state could avoid 8.9 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions by 2015, those savings are virtually wiped out twice a day at the Intermountain Power Project coal-fired plant near Delta that serves Los Angeles and other southern California cities.

The report includes recommendations for utilities to manage their operations more efficiently, but doesn't address carbon dioxide emissions from generation or analyze Utah's near-total reliance on the dirty power source.

That was by design, Geller said, because their charge from Huntsman was to examine the efficiency of energy use, not energy production. "We didn't want to go beyond that," Geller said.

Nor does the report quantify the potential improvements to Utah's air quality from reduced energy use, Nielsen said, adding that further reports building on the Blue Ribbon Advisory Council's work would take air pollution into account.

Tim Wagner, an energy expert for the Utah chapter of the Sierra Club and a council member, acknowledged that the energy efficiency plan could cut the state's carbon dioxide emissions by more than 10 percent over the next eight years.

But the IPP plant emits 15 million to 16 million tons of carbon dioxide each year, and a coal-fired plant proposed for construction in Sigurd would emit 2.2 million tons per year, he said. A planned new unit for IPP to serve Utah customers would emit about 8 million tons per year.