

DESERET NEWS

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Saving energy is big boon

Helping environment, economy is just the start

By Brice Wallace

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People who put in energy-efficient appliances or compact fluorescent light bulbs can generate more than just satisfaction that they're helping the environment and maybe cutting their utility bills.

The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEET) on Wednesday said its six-state study indicates an increased push for energy efficiency can lead to power savings, water conservation, environmental benefits and increased economic development.

"It won't happen by itself," said Howard Geller, SWEET founder and director. "The high-efficiency scenario is not the path we're on now. We need new policies and programs, expanded policies and programs. We have fairly good policies and programs in Utah. I would say that Utah is in the best shape in terms of having the best policies today, compared to the other five states. But there's still more that can be done and more that should be done in boosting those efforts to get us on the high-efficiency path."

The study compared scenarios. One was "business as usual," plotting how energy would be used based on current policies and trends and with demand at a 2.5 percent growth clip per year between 2003 and 2020. The other involved high efficiency — using currently available but underutilized technologies — with an annual load growth rate of 0.7 percent.

The savings could come through the use of more-efficient appliances, air conditioning and lighting systems; more-efficient design and construction of new homes and commercial buildings; and improvements in motor systems, devices and processes used by industry.

SWEET is hoping for state energy legislation, utility programs, stricter building energy codes and voluntary partnerships with the private sector as a way of prompting higher efficiency.

"Strong utility programs can get us half the savings," Geller said, noting that the programs could cost \$1.1 billion but could net savings of \$2.9 billion.

"It's fair to expect that more will be done to get high energy efficiency. I'm not sure what the final outcome will be, but the greater the savings, the greater the benefits will be," he said.

"It takes time. Energy is generally not the first priority for a business or household, but it can be an important source of cost reduction and adds to the bottom line. And more and more businesses are understanding this."

The projected increase in jobs through efficiency would result from shifting spending from fuel and energy industries to the more labor-intensive ones.

"The costs are much less to save energy than to supply energy. And energy efficiency can be an economic development strategy for the state. Utah, like every other state in the country, is facing an economic downturn, and energy efficiency can be one of the strategies for moving back into an economic growth curve where we're adding jobs and adding income in the state," Geller said.

The savings on emissions is not as great, percentage-wise, as other benefits because many new power plants are relatively clean, he said.

"It's a win-win strategy for businesses, consumers and the environment," he said.

Jeff Burks, energy policy coordinator for the state Department of Natural Resources, said the SWEEP projections corroborate results from other studies.

"An important piece is that energy efficiency has multiple benefits, and that is a message that is starting to catch on with the public," Burks said.

"This is a great report. I think it's the complete package, in many respects, and it comes at a great time."

SWEEP, a joint project of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy and the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies, also studied Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada and Wyoming.
