



Southwest Energy Efficiency Project

Saving Money and Reducing Pollution through Energy Conservation

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW STUDY REVEALS OVER \$8 BILLION COULD BE SAVED BY BUILDING MORE ENERGY-EFFICIENT NEW HOMES AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS IN THE SOUTHWEST

(Boulder, CO) -- The southwest region—including the states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming—is the fastest growing region in the country. About 2.3 million new single family homes and over 3 billion square feet of new commercial buildings are expected to be built in the region over the next twenty years.

A new study issued today by the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) suggests enormous potential for energy and cost savings by making these new homes and commercial buildings highly energy efficient. “While there are some very efficient new homes and commercial buildings being built today throughout the region, most new buildings are energy wasteful,” commented Dr. Larry Kinney, senior research at SWEEP and lead author of the report *Increasing Energy Efficiency in New Buildings in the Southwest*. “New homes and commercial buildings that waste energy cost more to operate and are less comfortable. They also waste precious resources such as natural gas and water and cause more pollution than energy-efficient new buildings.”

The study found that making new homes and commercial buildings in the region much more energy efficient could save consumers and businesses \$8.4 billion net during 2003-2020. While construction costs for energy efficiency buildings are usually higher, money saved through lower energy bills is expected to offset those costs three times over. Electricity saved—potentially 19 billion kWh per year by 2020—could eliminate the need for six new medium size power plants in the region. Natural gas saved—potentially 60 billion cubic feet per year by 2020—could mean that 1,200 fewer natural gas wells would need to be drilled in the region.

To realize these benefits, the new report recommends that state officials, local officials, and utilities in the region:

- Upgrade to state-of-the-art building energy codes to help guide builders,
- Expand training and technical assistance to increase code awareness and compliance,
- Provide additional education, training and financial incentives to encourage “beyond code” energy performance, and
- Raise the bar on “good practice” and further evaluate the actual energy performance of new homes and commercial buildings.

“Building energy codes are outdated and in a few cases nonexistent in some of the fastest growing metropolitan areas of the country, including Denver, Las Vegas, and Phoenix,” commented Dr. Howard Geller, co-author of the new report and Executive Director of SWEEP. “These jurisdictions should adopt up-to-date codes, train builders on how to meet the codes, and make certain they are followed. In addition, energy agencies and utilities should educate consumers and businesses and provide financial incentives for going well beyond the minimum energy performance of building codes. It is feasible to lower energy use by 30-50% relative to just meeting codes by combining energy-efficient technologies into a good building design,” Geller stated.

The types of efficiency measures included and recommended in the SWEEP study include:

- Better insulated walls and attics,
- More energy-efficient windows,
- Better air sealing of building envelopes and heating/cooling ducts,
- More efficient heating and air conditioning equipment, and
- More efficient lighting.

“It is a lot easier to build new homes and commercial buildings that are energy efficient than to go back in and retrofit existing buildings. Highly efficient new buildings will provide cost savings, increased occupant comfort, and other benefits for decades,” Kinney added.

Increasing Energy Efficiency in New Buildings in the Southwest examines the status of energy codes and “beyond code” efforts as well as the energy and cost savings potential from constructing more efficient new homes and commercial buildings in each of the six Southwest states. Copies of the complete study as well as the Executive Summary and fact sheets for each state are available on the SWEEP web site at www.swenergy.org/ieenb/index.html.

About SWEEP: The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) is a public interest organization focused on promoting greater energy efficiency and conservation in the states of Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. For more information, visit the SWEEP website at www.swenergy.org.