

Energy conservation incentives begin June 1

Program ranges from recycling to A.C. interruptions

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Posted Feb 22, 2008 @ 11:01 AM

SPRINGFIELD — That old refrigerator could be worth \$35 this summer. Provided it was made prior to 1993.

A refrigerator-recycling program is among a laundry list of consumer incentives that will be offered in Illinois starting June 1 to encourage reduced power usage.

The state's two largest utilities, Ameren and ComEd, both were required to submit the plans as part of a \$1 billion rate-relief package approved by legislators and the governor last year.

Ameren customers will pay on average another 36 cents a month to cover the cost of the programs, according to the utility.

"The idea is to reduce usage during the periods of peak demand," said Beth Bosch of the Illinois Commerce Commission, which just approved energy-savings programs for both Ameren and ComEd in Chicago.

Last year's rate-relief plan resulted after power bills for some consumers doubled and tripled with the lifting of a 10-year freeze on rates Jan. 1, 2007. The freeze was part of a 1997 utility reform bill intended to encourage more competition in Illinois power markets.

As part of the rate-relief package, the utilities were required to devise incentive programs for reducing customer use.

The 13 energy-saving measures in the Ameren program range from refrigerator recycling to a voluntary initiative that would allow the utility to remotely switch off residential central-air units for a few minutes during peak demand.

Large industrial customers have long had the option of interruptible service. Florida was among the early states to set up voluntary interruption-of-service programs for residential electric customers, said David Kolata, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board, a Chicago-based consumer advocacy group.

CUB also played a key role in devising last year's rate-relief plan.

"The way these programs work, is when prices get really high, you cycle the air conditioner off for 15 minutes (each hour). The consumer usually gets paid \$20 to \$30 a year so the utility has that option," said Kolata.

He called the energy-saving programs a "good start," but said CUB also remains concerned that utilities are largely responsible for implementing the programs.

Ameren spokesman Leigh Morris said details still must be worked out, including for the refrigerator recycling. He added that the voluntary interruption of service likely would attract only a small percentage of customers.

"All of these programs are aimed at reducing usage without sacrificing comfort," said Morris.

Ameren has set a goal of reducing electricity demand equal to the usage of 7,700 single-family homes in the first year, 23,300 homes in the second year and 46,700 in the third. The utility just filed a similar energy-savings program for natural gas customers, which still must be approved by the ICC.

Savings Program

- Electric customers of AmerenCIPS, AmerenCILCO and AmerenIP in Illinois are eligible.

- Effective June 1, 2008.

Program highlights:

- Residential diagnostic tuneups for central air-conditioning units; incentives to homeowners and dealers for installation of new, energy-efficient units.

- Refrigerator recycling program; a "change-a-light" initiative to encourage use of energy-efficient lighting; financial incentives to retailers who

encourage customers to buy energy-efficient appliances.

- Incentives for use of energy-efficient lighting, windows and other conservation measures in multi-family housing units.

- Target commercial and industrial customers to use more energy-efficient production processes and equipment; promote energy-efficient design in residential and commercial construction.

- Allow residential central air-conditioning customers the option of interruptible service during peak demand.

- Community incentives to upgrade street lighting.

- Provide customers with energy-savings toolkits and an interactive Web site on ways to reduce home energy usage.

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