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Saving your bottom line one bulb at a time

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By David Kolata

At CUB, we take saving money seriously - especially when it's your money.

For nearly 25 years, the Citizens Utility Board's mission has been to fight for lower telephone, gas and electric rates for Illinois consumers. We've saved more than \$10 billion by challenging rate hikes, winning consumer refunds and blocking utility attempts to weaken consumer-protection laws.

And with Illinois electric and gas companies - including ComEd, Peoples Gas and Nicor - seeking more than \$800 million in rate hikes, that fight is more important than ever. Fortunately, we've got a new weapon in our arsenal.

We're fighting budget-busting energy prices one bulb at a time.

CUB has launched a "Get Green" pledge campaign to get Illinois households to use at least one energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulb, the corkscrew bulbs that use 75 percent less energy than regular, incandescent bulbs.

One bulb may not seem like much, but if every U.S. household used one, it would save enough energy to light 3 million homes for a year and prevent the amount of pollution released from 800,000 cars. And, don't forget the \$600 million in savings on annual energy costs.

For the typical ComEd customer, each CFL installed in fixtures used at least four hours a day can save about \$10 a year. Install 10 of them and you'll trim your electric bill by \$100 a year.

But even better, every kilowatt hour of energy saved today lowers the price of energy tomorrow, increasing the bulbs' long-term benefits for everyone.

For many consumers, like Sandy S., who took CUB's Get Green pledge earlier this year, CFLs are a no-brainer.

"To be able to help the environment and save money is wonderful. What I don't understand is why the bulb aisle is still 90 percent traditional bulbs," she said. "Why?"

That's a question I ask myself, too. It's probably because the bulbs suffer from a lot of misconceptions. Older bulbs were significantly more expensive, and they didn't work in a lot of fixtures. However, every year they get cheaper and better. We hear from a lot of people who love the light output, and you can find CFLs specially made for dimmers and three-way lamps.

The bottom line is most consumers can save a bundle by installing the energy-saving bulbs, and CUB is determined to make that happen.

That's why we'll be at Westfield Chicago Ridge Mall from noon to 5 p.m. Aug. 9 distributing free CFLs. Come to the mall's Center Court, sign a Get Green pledge, take your bulb home and start saving. The pledge also enters you in a drawing to have your power bill paid for a month.

A free bulb, a free month's worth of electricity? These days, you don't often hear the word "free" in the same sentence with electricity - especially when headlines are screaming about a slumping economy and skyrocketing energy prices. It's about time consumers had some good news, for a change.

Citizens Utility Board executive director David Kolata writes a column each month. To reach CUB, call (800) 669-5556 or e-mail info@citizensutilityboard.org.

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