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## ComEd wants to test smart meters

By Lorene Yue  
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(Crain's) — Commonwealth Edison is asking the state for permission to include residents of Chicago and 10 suburban communities in a one-year pilot program to introduce so-called smart meters.

The electric utility, a division of Chicago-based Exelon Corp., said it will file its request Monday with the Illinois Commerce Commission seeking approval to start the program this year. ComEd expects the review process to take roughly six months and, if it gets the nod, plans to begin installing smart meters in 141,000 customers' homes in December.

Smart meters provide customers and the utility with instant information about power usage and availability. The meter also automatically notifies ComEd of electrical outages. And the utility could track usage to help set rates and manage supply more efficiently.

"Our goal is to have (the pilot program) in place by 2010," said Anne Pramaggiore, ComEd's president and CEO. "We want to test it over the summer," when electricity usage is typically highest.

The cost of the pilot program would be borne by all 5.8 million ComEd customers. An average of 25 cents would be tacked on to every monthly bill in 2010, with the charge dropping to an average of 14 cents by 2011.

David Kolata, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board watchdog group, said creating a so-called smart power grid could be "very good" for the consumer if done correctly. He said that he was "cautiously optimistic" that ComEd's program could make it the best smart grid in the country.

"We're not quite there yet," Mr. Kolata said. "There are some details that still need to be worked out. I think things are moving in the right direction."

The meters would go into homes in Chicago, Bellwood, Berwyn, Broadview, Forest Park, Hillside, Maywood, Melrose Park, Oak Park and River Forest. An 11th community will be added, based on which one wins ComEd's Community Energy Challenge, a contest calling for municipalities to develop energy-efficient policies and practices.

ComEd is also asking the ICC to support an application to be sent to the U.S. Department of Energy requesting federal stimulus funds to offset the program's cost. ComEd representatives could not immediately give the total cost of the pilot program.

A subset of about 10,000 customers in the smart meter pilot program would also test one of three rate-pricing programs. Customer would pay either a real-time rate instead of the fixed rate ComEd charges everyone, or get a rebate for cutting back on power use during peak hours. A third pricing program would charge customers on a tiered system in which the first 20% of power used by a customer would be charged at ComEd's lowest rate, the next 70% charged at slightly higher rate and the final 10% charged at the highest rate.