



ComEd asks state for OK on smart grid pilot

By Anna Marie Kukec | Daily Herald Business Writer

Published: 6/2/200 12:12 AM

More Coverage

Suburban homeowners often cringe with the onset of severe storms, anticipating damage or at least the loss of electricity.

Video

- [ComEd's smart grid](#)

But, under a fee schedule created for next year, they may have a little help on the outage concern. Instead of reaching for the phone when the lights go out, they could be sitting back and not needing to report the issue it at all.

A new smart meter could do it all for them, possibly as early as next year.

Chicago-based ComEd, which has operations in Oak Brook, filed a petition on Monday with the Illinois Commerce Commission seeking permission to start a pilot program for a new "smart" electrical grid and to install new meters in 141,000 homes in Chicago and a dozen suburbs.

The filing also asked the commission to support ComEd in its proposal to receive an unnamed amount of stimulus funds to help finance part of the pilot and future smart grid investments.

"If approved, this will be the largest pilot of smart grid technology in the Midwest and the most comprehensive test of how customers will use the meters," said ComEd spokeswoman Rachel Gerds.

The smart grid would be an interactive system that provides real-time information to consumers and to the utility about energy consumption, and could even report outages and offer e-mail alerts to mobile phones.

The state agency could take up to six months to approve the pilot proposal. The program could start after that, possibly in November, said Gerds.

In September 2008, ComEd received approval from the commission for a delivery rate hike that would generate about \$270 million in additional revenue. That meant the average household saw an additional \$4.50 on its monthly bill.

At that same time, the commission also approved another fee for the smart grid only if ComEd conducts a study on it first. The utility has to show how the smart grid would be built, the technology used, its cost and potential benefits to consumers.

Estimates show the smart grid could cost customers an additional 55 cents per month starting in April through June 2010. It may be cut to 26 cents per month July through September 2010, and then 22 cents October through December 2010, Gerds said.

That study, any state approvals and the build-out of such a smart grid network could take a long time but provide future benefits to customers, said Jim Chilsen, spokesman for the Citizens Utility Board, a Chicago-based consumer watchdog.

"If done right, this has the ability to improve reliability of the system and to help save consumers money," Chilsen said.

According to ComEd's request on Monday, the utility plans to install about 141,000 new smart meters in homes in the city of Chicago and 10 suburbs. They are Bellwood, Berwyn, Broadview, Forest Park, Hillside, Maywood, Melrose Park, Oak Park and River Forest.

"These communities reflect the different attributes of our service territories," Gerd said.

Another participating suburb is expected to be announced later this week and be part of the ComEd's Community Energy Challenge, a program where local municipalities develop proposed integration plans for the smart grid technology. ComEd also is recommending installation of limited numbers of the smart meters at other locations.

Customers in these towns will be notified of the pilot and ComEd will install the new meters. If the pilot goes well, ComEd could roll out the program throughout its territory in 2010, Gerd said.

"What customers respond to could determine how the meter is configured," Gerd said.