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Utility Board hopes incentives will lead to energy-saving

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BY [SANDRA GUY](#) Staff Reporter

Would a \$5-off coupon at Leona's restaurant, a free child's ticket to the Chicago Children's Museum or the opportunity to donate to local schools be extra incentive to dial down your air conditioning this summer or unplug the coffee maker after you leave a room?

The Citizens Utility Board (CUB), the state's non-profit utility watchdog, is hoping it is.

The first 10,000 ComEd customers in Illinois who log on to a new energy-savings Web site, CUBenergysaver.com, will be eligible to earn points that they can redeem at stores, museums and restaurants such as Leona's restaurant, Barbara's Bookstore, CVS pharmacy, Treasure Island supermarket and SciTech Hands On Museum.

Participants must give their address and connect CUB Energy Saver to their ComEd account. They do this by signing up for online access to their ComEd account and then linking the account to the CUB Energy Saver, or by giving the Energy Saver their account and meter numbers. The information is kept private, CUB Executive Director David Kolata said at a news conference today.

CUB is using technology from New York-based companies RecycleBank and Efficiency 2.0 to let consumers -- including ComEd customers who don't get in on the redeemable points -- to take part in a variety of competitive, social-networking and educational activities on the Web site.

People who are not ComEd customers can still build a money-saving plan through the Web site, but they cannot participate in the rewards program.

Kolata said that CUB is hoping to set up a rewards program with other utilities in Illinois such as Ameren.

Groups, communities, colleges and universities can compete to save the most energy and win a "grand prize" of 10,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs.

The groups compete in two categories: percentage of energy reduced and number of participants. The groups are listed on a "Leader Board."

The groups may share their energy-use information on a Facebook-style service on the Web site, or set up their own blogs on the site.

Users sign in with their name, email address and street address. Those eligible for the rewards program also set up a password.

The users set up their own "personal audits" showing the types of power they use -- electric heating, central air-conditioning and electric water-heating, for example. They choose a

saving plan from three options: No-cost, low-cost, and home investment.

They can track on the Web site how much they are saving by replacing a certain number of light bulbs or washing a load of clothes in cold water, among other activities.

Those who qualify for points earn 100 points for participating in the program, plus two points for each kilowatt hour that CUB verifies they have saved, based on their electric bill. The \$5 coupon for Leona's is rewarded for 50 points, and one free child's admission to the museum requires 100 points, for example.

Individual users also may view a map that lets them see how their energy savings compare with others in the neighborhood. Users may turn off this feature if they don't want to be listed on the neighborhood map, and they may compare themselves to the community as a whole rather than to individual neighbors.

The more information people provide about their homes, lifestyle and habits, the more detail the CUB Energy Saver Web site offers in money-saving tips.

A pilot program of about 3,000 participants in Chicago's 5th, 8th and 19th wards showed that participants can cut their energy use by about 6 percent, on average, for a savings of roughly \$200 a year.

Those pilot participants will have to visit the new Web site to sign up to receive rewards points.

The site eventually will link users to Amazon.com's Web site so that they can buy energy-efficient products that are now listed on the Energy Saver site, such as low-flow shower heads and energy-saving lightbulbs, said Adam Sandler, vice president of online marketing for Efficiency 2.0.

The site also will ask users one additional question each time they log in to build up a more complete profile on which to recommend energy-efficiency tips, Sandler said.

Kolata said CUB is offering the variety of incentives -- rewards points, updated energy-use information, and energy-efficiency tips customized to the user -- in hopes of giving people an incentive that will prove meaningful enough to save energy.

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moejoy wrote:

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