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## **Electric bill savings can come easily, consumer group says**

BY SANDRA GUY

Business Reporter

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David Johnson of Des Plaines has saved more than \$1,000 on his ComEd electric bill in the past eight months after signing up for the Citizens Utility Board's Energy Saver program, where he tracks his electric-bill savings and earns points that he redeems for groceries.

Johnson, 56, an independent web designer and database administrator, said he jumped at the chance to participate in the Energy Saver program because "it seemed obvious — anything to save money."

"I've always tried to be energy-conscious and environmentally conscious," said Johnson, who appeared Tuesday at a CUB news conference in which the advocacy group announced that ComEd residential customers can save \$55 a year on power bills and \$49 on natural gas bills by taking the simplest steps to save electricity.

The results of CUB's "Making Every Kilowatt Count" study are based on data from 11,682 Chicagoans who have signed up for the CUB Energy Saver program since it launched a year ago.

CUB said ComEd's 3.4 million consumers are wasting \$189 million a year — even more than ComEd's latest rate hike — by neglecting simple steps such as closing the blinds on summer days, washing larger loads of dishes and turning off the coffee maker after brewing their morning cup of Joe.

Johnson said he enjoys following Twitter feeds from CUB and the Energy Saver program, which offer advice on the many steps people can take to cut their electric bills.

He uses compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs throughout his two-bedroom condo, turns off the air conditioning and opens the windows as often as possible, and has insulated his curtains by putting a new backing on them.

Johnson tried to use CFL bulbs more than a year ago. He was surprised that the newest versions cost less than \$1 apiece at discount retailers.

He has also learned that using the dishwasher efficiently is more cost-effective than washing dishes by hand because the dishwasher recycles the water.

"Just finding a good drape backing saved me a couple hundred bucks," he said.

Users sign in to CUBEnergySaver.com with their name and ComEd account number. So far, only ComEd customers may track their power use in detail and redeem points, though CUB officials say they

are working to add competing utilities to the system.

Users set up their own personal audits showing the types of power they use, and choose a saving plan. The website works like a Google search, plying through public and private databases to figure out the user's household size, market value, whether the property is owned or rented, the property's exterior characteristics and whether it has a Jacuzzi or a swimming pool.

Those who save energy qualify for points that they can redeem at local retailers. Johnson has bought \$40 in groceries at Wal-Mart with the 6,400 CUB Energy Saver points he has redeemed. He plans to buy gift cards for family and friends with his next batch of reward points.

CUB also is partnering with the Sierra Club of Illinois and the city of Evanston to encourage people to use the Energy Savings program to cut their electric bills. Evanston is sponsoring a competition among the city's seven largest employers to see which can save the most. So far, the three-month contest has resulted in more than \$11,000 in energy savings, said Catherine Hurley, the city's sustainable programs coordinator.

Said CUB Executive Director David Kolata, "This is the tip of the iceberg. The bad news is that we are overpaying. But there is a lot more potential for energy savings."

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