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By *The News-Gazette*

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CHAMPAIGN — Ameren has \$78 million in energy-efficiency rebates and discounts available to residential and commercial customers in downstate Illinois, representatives of two statewide groups said Tuesday.

"These programs help Ameren customers maintain their current level of comfort at the same time that they use less energy," said Rob Kelter, a senior attorney with the Environmental Law & Policy Center in Chicago. "We are teaming up with (the Citizens Utility Board) because these programs are a win-win for consumers and the environment. Consumers not only save money on their bills, but we reduce pollution from coal-fired power plants."

Because of the anticipated reduction in energy use, Kelter said, there will be a reduction in levels of carbon dioxide, mercury and soot in the air.

The groups said consumers can get discounts and rebates on the purchase of compact fluorescent bulbs (at certain retailers), central air conditioning units and room air conditioners, heat-pump water heaters, programmable thermostats and other items.

Information is available at <http://www.actonenergy.com> ^[2]. Customers also can get more information from the Citizens Utility Board at 1-800-669-5556.

"Remember that energy efficiency isn't about sacrifice. It's about doing the same things you already do and spending less while doing them," said Celia Christiansen with the Citizens Utility Board.

The \$78 million provided for the rebates comes from ratepayers, Kelter said, not from Ameren shareholders.

"The ratepayers fund these programs," he said. "Ameren would be buying more power on the market to replace what we are doing with energy efficiency. So it's cheaper for customers, but they're definitely paying for it."

Kelter said that based on past experience he expects all of the \$78 million available will be used.

"In the first three years of this program, everything has been spent. And if there's a little bit left over, it will be spent next year," he said.

State Sen. Mike Frerichs, D-Champaign, and state Rep. Naomi Jakobsson, D-Urbana, both attended a news conference Tuesday where the program was promoted.

"Quite frankly all this talk about coal gasification, alternative technologies, new things out there, the easiest thing we can do to make sure we're energy-efficient is to cut back on the amount of energy we use," Frerichs said.

"To know that our air quality is better because of the efforts that have been taken, and that it can get cleaner if more people take advantage of these opportunities, I hope that people go for the discounts if they are thinking about upgrading anything at home," Jakobsson said.

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