

Illinois Energy Now

Energy efficiency may lack the visual appeal of a shiny array of solar panels, whirling wind turbine, or natural gas plant; yet it carries far-reaching implications for economic growth and social development as the country's most reliable, least expensive and cleanest energy resource available. DCEO—through its program Illinois Energy Now—is working hard to convey the benefits of energy efficiency and move toward a cleaner, more sustainable path of energy production and consumption.

Illinois Energy Now was first enacted by legislation in 2007 as part of the Energy Efficiency Portfolio Standard (EEPS), a portfolio of electric and natural gas energy efficiency programs created to reduce energy and gas demand. Illinois Energy Now provides public sector customers and low-income residential entities with millions of dollars in financial incentives for energy efficiency improvements.

Incentive packages are geared toward projects of all shapes and sizes, including standard (replacing old with new), custom (design oriented), new construction, and retro-commissioning programs. Costs of such projects can be reimbursed up to 75 percent through the program. Such incentives are aimed at one goal: to reduce the electricity and natural gas load by 2% annually by 2015 and beyond. Individual customers and residents also benefit from reduced utility bills.

Illinois Energy Now also garners broad support amongst the largest utility providers in Illinois, including ComEd, Ameren, Nicor and Integrys. These companies also provide their own energy efficiency programs and incentives to the private sector, with a focus on reducing energy consumption through efficiencies and changes in behavior. By partnering with these organizations, Illinois Energy Now is able to receive 25 percent of its funding through a System Benefits Charge on utility customers' monthly utility bill, thereby avoiding reliance on state tax dollars.

The impact of the measures taken through Illinois Energy Now goes far beyond energy and dollar savings. This program not only serves as a powerful tool to help the environment, but also provides consumers with the education and training they need to make more energy-efficient choices. Recognizing the importance of such efforts, the Illinois Energy Now Trade Ally Program was developed to provide a link between the program and energy efficiency customers to increase program participation, create jobs, and raise awareness of the incentive programs.

Although energy efficiency cannot be seen, the success stories of initiatives taken through Illinois Energy Now certainly can. From upgrading lighting in parking garages and schools to making large-scale equipment and building improvements, thousands of dollars in rebates have been given, and even more money has been saved per year as a result.

The concept of energy efficiency is simple: using less energy to perform the same task, while maintaining the same quality of life. But the implementation of such efforts is challenging. Illinois Energy Now serves as a platform to provide the tools, resources, and funding needed to turn an ideal situation into reality.