

Energy Efficiency and Natural Gas Utilities

Engaging local communities to save more energy

CASCADE NATURAL GAS & COMMUNITY ENERGY EFFICIENCY PROGRAM PARTNERS

Text The Cascade Natural Gas Conservation Incentive Programs' goal has always been to help customers use their natural gas wisely. In its role as prudent steward of the environment, Cascade strives to help customers conserve their energy as well as save money on their energy bills throughout the year.

Cascade focuses on encouraging customers to install high-efficiency natural gas upgrades in residential, commercial and industrial properties. The largest hurdle to achieving Therm savings has been to keep the public regularly informed and engaged in conservation programs. It requires consistent messaging from multiple sources (beyond the gas utility) to remind consumers of the potential savings associated with installing higher efficiency upgrades. This includes educating consumers on the proper method of making cost comparisons, which go beyond the initial purchase and installation cost of an upgrade to include the costs and savings over the lifespan of the upgrade. While Cascade and its efficiency programs consistently provides messages via radio, outreach events, bill inserts and the internet, we have found more success when we complement these communications with community-wide energy efficiency efforts.

In its drive to increase customer awareness and engagement in its efficiency programs, Cascade Natural Gas has sought partners in local communities and has been fortunate to partner with Community Energy Efficiency Program (CEEP) organizations in Washington, such as the Sustainable Living Center in Walla Walla, RePower in Kitsap County, and the Opportunity Council (through its Community Energy Challenge and the Sustainable Connections efforts) in Bellingham and Anacortes.

CEEP was created as a pilot program by the Washington State Legislature in 2009 and is administered by the Washington State University Extension Energy Program. Funding for program participants originated in the U.S. Department of Energy's State Energy Program and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The funds are used to help deliver energy efficiency upgrades to targeted customers throughout Washington State – both homeowners and small businesses. Once the pilot efforts had wrapped up, additional funds were provided by the legislature to participating organizations to leverage existing community investments.

CEEP funded organizations have been creative in their approach to help customers reduce energy usage. Approaches include performing energy audits, making energy saving recommendations, maintaining trade ally networks of qualified contractors, and leveraging utility cash rebates by supplementing them with additional rebates. In each program phase, the CEEP group has been an integral partner with Cascade. CEEP organizations have been instrumental in providing direct interaction with community members and helping them to apply, and more importantly, to qualify for efficiency rebate programs. In many situations the community organization has helped make the final

push in encouraging customers to implement the higher-efficiency option, by deepening their understanding of how various home features affect comfort, health and overall energy usage.

Cascade values one-on-one interactions with our customers and the ability to provide energy efficiency audits; however, limited resources constrain our ability to do so. Hence, these partnerships with local organizations, who can reach community members and perform energy efficiency services, have proven immensely beneficial to all parties involved. When customers learn to evaluate their energy usage on a whole home basis, as opposed to a one-off upgrade, overall reductions in energy use and the potential for repeated efficiency improvements increase dramatically.

In their efforts to support communities competing in Georgetown University Energy Prize, both the Sustainable Living Center and the Opportunity Council have consistently partnered with Cascade Natural Gas as well as local electric utilities to augment the efficiency resources available to local community members including energy usage information, energy saving tips, and efficiency rebates. They also provide communities with energy audits, assistance with applying for utility rebates, and with a broader understanding of the wide range of efficiency program services offered by local utilities like Cascade.

Partnering with CEEP organizations has not only allowed gas and electric utilities to support local efforts to reduce energy consumption but also serves as a means to provide customers with the information they need to improve the efficiency of their homes. Providing customers with the knowledge and assistance they need to make a wise energy choice has proven a successful approach to increasing program acceptance and decreasing community energy consumption.

Contact: Monica Cowlshaw, Manager, Energy Efficiency & Community Outreach, Cascade Natural Gas, Monica.Cowlshaw@cngc.com

Online Info: Cascade Natural Gas Conservation Programs www.cngc.com/conservation
Sustainable Living Center <http://www.sustainablelivingcenter.com/>
Opportunity Council Community Energy Challenge and Sustainable Connections
<http://sustainableconnections.org/>

Cascade Natural Gas serves Anacortes, Bellingham, and Walla Walla in Washington, and Bend, Oregon — four of 50 communities across the United States competing in the Georgetown University Energy Prize to make the most significant impact on energy savings.