

Energy Efficiency and Natural Gas Utilities

Engaging local communities to save more energy

COMMUNITY ENERGY SERVICES — MINNESOTA ENERGY RESOURCES CORPORATION

The Community Energy Services program is offered by Minnesota Energy Resources Corporation and, when amenable, by the local electric utility. It provides energy efficiency education through workshops where low cost efficiency measures are provided to attendees who sign-up for an in-home audit. Attendees are also given assistance in installing the materials during the in-home audit, support for installing air sealing and insulation with a cadre of pre-selected contractors, utility rebates and access to non-utility financing, and a high quality standard and control.

The program includes a core of four efficiency measures, each building on the other, which is then tailored to individual house type and occupants.

Efficiency Workshop

Our Implementation Contractor executes its community organization efforts by soliciting and training volunteers, organizing neighborhood/community based outreach efforts, and organizing and implementing workshops. Participants provide energy usage release forms for utility bill information either at the workshops or during neighborhood/community based outreach efforts. Participants then attend the workshop where they learn about energy efficiency. At that time, the Implementation Contractor gathers more information about participants' homes, such as square footage, home age and so on. House information is combined with assessor data to determine the Home Heating Index for the home, which allows pre-screening of households and a "triage" approach to build in more time for households with higher energy usage.

At the workshop, participants have the opportunity to sign up for an in-home visit. Those who sign up for the in-home visit receive low-cost gas measures for their home. These include low flow showerheads, faucet and kitchen faucet aerators, and pipe insulation. If the electric utility decides to partner with us, they have the option to provide additional electric measures. Not all participants who sign up for the in-home visit automatically receive all the measures on the list, because the package is tailored to their home needs.

In-Home Visits and the Energy Auditor

Information gathered from the customer at the workshops is provided to the Energy Auditor. The Auditor obtains gas usage data and schedules and conducts the in-home visit. In addition to performing the audit and reinforcing behavior changes that will impact energy use, the Auditor verifies installation of the low-cost gas measures provided at the workshop and assists in installing measures as needed. The in-home visit report is provided to the customer with an explanation of the findings. It is also provided to the Implementation Contractor.

Major Improvements and the Implementation Contractor

For both the air sealing and major insulation components of the program, the Implementation Contractor coordinates all insulation contractor services to make the upgrade process as easy as possible for the homeowner. If the audit determines that either air sealing or insulation is recommended, the Implementation Contractor assists the homeowner obtain bids from third-party insulation contractors. The Implementation Contractor works with qualified insulation contractors to develop a standardized bidding system to ensure the bids are as low-cost as possible to the homeowner, while providing sufficient revenue for insulation contractors to remain in the program. Participants are not required to use these insulation contractors and may elect another contractor, but their preferred insulation contractor must be approved by the Implementation Contractor. Implementation of major measures, such as building envelope measures, qualifies for rebates from Minnesota Energy Resources under this program. Customers may also qualify for qualified heating and water heating system rebates through Minnesota Energy Resources' Residential Rebates program.

The Implementation Contractor also establishes quality control protocols for the program. After work is completed by the insulation contractor, the Implementation Contractor sends an energy technician to verify the work was completed according to specifications, using infrared camera or other assessment means. Insulation contractors are required to do call-backs for work not meeting quality standards. After a minimum number of jobs is completed by a given contractor, job inspections continue to be performed but on a random schedule.

In addition to this program's efficiency measures, the Implementation Contractor promotes other utility conservation programs as appropriate. The Implementation Contractor also offers financing options to participants who need it, in order to further reduce barriers to action. Applications for federal tax credits, utility rebates and financing opportunities are all offered to the homeowner to reduce the first-costs of adopting efficiency improvements.

Insulation contractor training is an integral part of the program. All air sealing and insulation contractors are required to undergo proper training to join the network of eligible contractors in this program. The Implementation Contractor provides this training, supported with separate State funding.

This program is marketed as Neighborhood Energy Challenge in Rochester, MN.

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http://www.minnesotaenergyresources.com/home/neighborhood_challenge.aspx

Minnesota Energy Resources Saving Energy

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