



June 9, 2008

My Turn: Efficiency best energy solution

By Chris Burns

At Burlington Electric Department we spend a lot of time promoting energy efficiency to our customers. It is still by far the least expensive way to meet our electricity needs.

Burlington as a whole in 2007 used about the same amount of electricity as it did in 1989. This was in spite of significant growth throughout the city, including expansion at the University of Vermont, Champlain College and at the hospital. While we have done much efficiency work, much is left to do.

BED and Efficiency Vermont are sponsoring "Project Porchlight," an energy efficiency awareness campaign in greater Burlington starting in June and running throughout the summer. For more information, visit www.burlingtonelectric.com and click on the "Project Porchlight" icon.

Community volunteers will distribute to each household one free compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulb and other information about making simple changes to reduce energy.

One of the main goals of Project Porchlight is to demonstrate the enormous impact people within a community can have when they take simple steps to reduce energy. If every home in Burlington replaced just two old-fashioned, incandescent bulbs with two CFLs, it would save about 1.5 million kilowatt-hours annually, enough electricity for about 270 Burlington homes. With even more changes, imagine the possibilities!

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the United States could save \$600 million of energy annually (equivalent in greenhouse gas reductions to removing 800,000 cars from the roads) if every household replaced just one incandescent light bulb with an Energy Star-qualified bulb. This is enough electricity to power more than three million homes.

Along with efficiency measures, BED also stresses the importance of energy conservation. With some simple behavioral changes -- such as turning off lights, computers and television sets that are not being used, by turning on only the amount of lighting that is needed, by turning off the porch light during the daytime, by being sure that windows are not left open when the heating or the air conditioning is on, by making sure that the heat setting is as low as possible and the AC (if you need it at all) is at the warmest setting -- all our customers could reduce their energy bills, some dramatically, without paying a single cent or changing out a single appliance. While these suggestions may sound simple, they are often not followed, resulting in much higher energy bills than necessary.

We know of some Burlington businesses that reduced their bills fairly substantially after BED conducted an energy audit and worked with them to install efficient products. When they then focused on conservation -- getting their employees to be more mindful of their overall energy usage -- they were able to reduce much more. When employees always remembered to turn off appliances and equipment, not to idle their vehicles and to be sure that various settings were properly set, the consumption dropped dramatically -- sometimes by over 35 percent! We

have heard of similar stories in households around Burlington.

With the end of cheap oil upon us and with global warming threatening our planet, conservation and efficiency are the two best means we have to gain control of our energy bills. If we do this, we can feel good about our contribution to the planet's health and, of course, to our local economy. Using less energy means keeping more dollars here at home, which has a multiplier effect in stimulating the economy. Using less means improved energy security because we will be less dependent on foreign sources of fuel. Using less means a cleaner environment.

So all you have to do is to remember that if you use energy do it in the most efficient manner possible, and if you are not using it, turn it off. You will start to notice the savings adding up.

Chris Burns of Burlington is director of energy services for Burlington Electric Department.
