



Funds keep efficiency efforts rolling

By Erin Huntimer

Consumers' reasons for wanting to save electricity vary. Some want to save money. Others want to do their part for the environment. A few just want the latest, greatest efficient technologies.

Whatever their reasons, consumers are seeking advice – and a few bucks – to get their conservation efforts rolling. Members of electric cooperatives are in luck. They're served by energy experts armed with know-how and rebates. Basin Electric is funding some of those rebates; others are funded by unique programs, like the one being offered by the state of North Dakota through local electric cooperatives.

Flexible funds for member co-ops

Basin Electric member cooperatives can access funds for their rebate programs through Basin Electric's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Grant Program.

Basin Electric launched the grant program in 2009 to support member cooperative energy efficiency and conservation efforts. The Basin Electric board approved the 2010 program in April with a funding level

of \$1 million. Funds are available to Class A member cooperatives based on the previous year's patronage.

Chris Baumgartner, Basin Electric manager of member relations, says Basin Electric has worked closely with the membership to identify energy-efficient technologies that both fit member needs and demonstrate a positive return on investment for dollars invested.

"The primary purpose of Basin Electric's Energy Efficiency and Conservation Grant Program is to provide a funding mechanism for rebates at a local level that encourage efficiency practices, and to assist members in meeting state, regional or national energy efficiency mandates," he says.

The 2009 grant program resulted in an energy savings of 13.4 million kilowatt-hours throughout the Basin Electric membership.

Chad Reisenauer, Basin Electric key accounts/energy conservation coordinator, coordinates the program. He says the 2010 program leaves in place the current eligible installations, and includes some additions: heat-pump water heaters, insulation, commercial lighting and variable-frequency drives.

"We've also added an 'other' category. If a cooperative identifies the installation of an efficient technology that can

demonstrate a positive return, we'll support it in the grant program," he says. Requests for the "other" category will be evaluated by Basin Electric staff on a case-by-case basis.

"The program is designed to be flexible; each cooperative decides how to implement its own local rebate program," Baumgartner says.

Funds are available on a 50-percent matching basis, meaning Basin Electric and the cooperative share financial responsibility for the program. "For example, if a member-consumer installs a qualifying ground-source heat pump and the cooperative issues a rebate of \$800, Basin Electric will reimburse the cooperative \$400," Reisenauer says.

The 2010 grant program is retroactive to Jan. 1, 2010, and any funds Class A members did not use under the 2009 program will be rolled over to their 2010 allocations. To request funds, Basin Electric member cooperatives must log on to www.basinmembers.com and complete a grant request form.

In addition to the grant program, Basin Electric also supports member efficiency and conservation efforts by offering training programs for cooperative staff as well as providing expertise and loaning equipment to help in energy auditing efforts. The Electric

Technologies Demonstration program is also changing its focus to support and market member efficiency and conservation efforts.

“Basin Electric’s program is designed to be separate and independent of any state or federal program,” Baumgartner says. “Basin Electric’s members serve in nine states, and each state distributes its funds differently. Our program requirements are the same throughout our service territory.”

Co-ops assist state

The state of North Dakota has grant funds up for grabs, but rather than go it alone in rolling out the program, the state sought assistance from its resident energy experts – electric cooperatives and their investor-owned neighbors.

The state received funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and is distributing them through the Commerce Department’s State Energy Program. The department invited the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) to work with them and investor-owned utilities to develop a Utility Rebate Program that promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies to both residential and commercial customers.

Harlan Fuglesten, NDAREC communications and government relations director/legal counsel, says North Dakota’s cooperatives have about \$2.4 million to distribute, mostly for rebates. Of this, about \$1.5 million is available for energy efficiency rebates and about \$900,000 is available for renewable energy rebates.

NDAREC established a Stimulus Response Task Force composed of managers, member service directors, office managers and other cooperative employees to work on technical details of the program. Baumgartner represents Basin Electric on the task force.

“The co-ops and investor-owned utilities worked together to design programs that were uniform, but allowed each utility to emphasize the rebates that worked best for their customers,” Fuglesten says. North Dakota is thought to be one of the only states to work with utilities on developing its program, he says.

Rebates vary in amount, and customers are limited to the total amount of rebates they can receive. Residential customers can get energy efficiency rebates for high-efficiency central air conditioning systems, air-source heat pumps, off-peak thermal energy storage heating furnaces, high-efficiency thermal storage water heaters with a heat pump, and attic and wall insulation. Commercial customers can get rebates for high-efficiency central air conditioning systems; air-source heat pumps; certain replacement high-efficiency lighting; premium efficiency motors and variable speed drives; and custom building recommissioning. Both residential and commercial customers can receive rebates for energy audits.

Renewable energy rebates are available to both residential and commercial customers for closed-loop geothermal heat pumps, small wind turbines, and photovoltaics. Limits to the size of the qualifying systems and the amount of the rebate do apply.

The program begins on June 1 and ends when the money runs out. Rebates will be provided on a first-come, first-served basis.

“Members’ applications will be reviewed by the local cooperative, and then forwarded to NDAREC. NDAREC will send the rebate checks back to the local cooperative for distribution to the members,” Fuglesten says.

“There are a few limitations to this program, so consumers should check with their cooperatives before assuming they are eligible. For example, rebates cannot be used by federal, state or local government entities. Also, some rebates require an energy audit, including rebates for insulation and building recommissioning,” he says.

Cooperative members can get program details and forms from their local cooperative, or from www.ndarec.com.

Basin Electric grant program

The 2010 Energy Efficiency and Conservation Grant Program leaves in place the current eligible installations, and includes the following additions.

Eligible installation	Rebate amount	Requirements
Heat pump water heaters	\$350 max.	≥ .90 energy factor
Insulation	10% of installed cost (\$500 max.)	Electrically heated homes only
Commercial lighting	\$250/kW saved for non-LED; varies for LED	Contact Basin Electric
Variable frequency drives	\$50/hp	For pumps & fans only
Other	Case-by-case basis	Contact Basin Electric

Full program details are available at www.basinmembers.com. For more information, contact Chad Reisenauer at 701-557-5710 or chadr@bepc.com.