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Xcel Energy seeks 35 percent energy efficiency increase

by [Bob Geiger](#) Staff Writer

Minneapolis-based Xcel Energy Inc. customers soon could be able to save even more energy and money. The utility announced a program Monday designed to increase energy efficiency 35 percent over the next 3 years.

The Minnesota Office of Energy Security recently approved Xcel Energy's Conservation Improvement Program, or CIP proposal, which is designed to guide Xcel Energy's electricity and natural gas energy efficiency and load management efforts through 2012.

"Our energy efficiency programs help customers lower their energy bills," said Judy Pofert, president and chief executive officer, Northern States Power Co.-Minnesota, an Xcel Energy company, in a news release, "and this plan will help us avoid the need to build one medium-sized power plant along with its resulting environmental impact."

For more than 20 years, Xcel Energy has provided a variety of programs for Minnesota homeowners and businesses. To date, enough energy has been saved through Minnesota energy efficiency programs to avoid building eight 250-megawatt power plants.

The latest CIP effort is designed to continue positioning Xcel Energy as a leader in energy efficiency and demand-side management.

The utility's CIP program will help realize energy consumption savings of 1,116 gigawatt hours, energy demand savings of 316 megawatts, and 2,461,482 dekatherms of natural gas energy savings over the next 3 years.

Energy savings achieved over the plan's duration is enough to meet the electric needs of 138,000 homes and the natural gas needs of 27,000 homes for one year.

New in this plan is the Solar*Rewards program, which provide rebates to business and residential customers who install solar photovoltaic systems of up to 40 kilowatts in generation capacity on their premises.

Xcel Energy will purchase Renewable Energy Credits, or RECs, generated by its customers' solar systems. During the 2008 session, Minnesota legislators agreed that renewable energy resources such as solar, which meet certain energy efficiency requirements, may be included within public utilities' CIP plans.

"We believe solar will be an important resource in Minnesota for meeting our customers' energy needs, and we want to develop its use on our system," said Pofert. "This program will help us support our customers' strong interest in renewable energy options."

Also new in this program is expanded outreach to Xcel Energy's Minnesota residential customers, offering one-on-one partnering to reduce energy costs and increase the energy efficiency of homes.

CIP program highlights for residential customers include:

Energy Efficiency Support Services: This service provides customers with web-based information about energy efficiency strategies, systems, equipment and program information, contacts and a free consulting service to help homeowners communicate with contractors.

Refrigerator Recycling: A \$35 incentive will be offered to residential customers to recycle functioning, secondary refrigerators, usually found in a garage or basement.

Residential Home Energy Squad: A technician visits a customer's home and installs a variety of energy efficiency improvements – such as Compact Fluorescent Lights, energy-efficient showerheads, weather stripping and more. Customers purchase the materials from the technician, and labor is free.

For Minnesota business customers, the plan will offer substantially increased rebate opportunities, study funding and provide more individual advisory services. These programs are available to all large and small commercial and industrial customer segments, such as retail, office, hospital, manufacturing, education and government facilities.

The CIP program complies with Minnesota's Next Generation Energy Act of 2007. That act, passed by the Minnesota Legislature and signed by Gov. Tim Pawlenty, was designed to bolster investments in renewable power, increase energy efficiency and decrease Minnesota's carbon and other emissions.