

Efficiency programs help reduce energy load, costs

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Summer's here. That means warmer weather – and higher electric bills. However, there are ways to reduce your energy usage and save money. And chances are your utility company already has programs in place to help you do it.

If you're unfamiliar with these programs, you're not alone. Most people don't think to turn to their electric company to learn how to use less energy. But in fact, utilities across the state, including Oklahoma's two largest, have a variety of programs to help consumers avoid energy waste and lower their bills. Despite their effectiveness, many customers are unaware of these programs, and this knowledge gap was a topic of discussion at a recent multi-day Town Hall held by statewide nonprofit The Oklahoma Academy. The conclusions from the Town Hall were subsequently announced at a press conference with elected officials.

At the press conference, The Oklahoma Academy released recommendations concerning the state's energy future. These included increasing Oklahomans' awareness of energy efficiency and demand response programs that are designed to avoid energy waste or shift energy usage to times when the grid is less strained. The aim of the programs is to reduce utilities' overall electricity demand, which has several benefits. One, it reduces the need, thus expense, for utilities to build additional generation plants and power lines. As a result, associated environmental impacts are reduced and customers' electricity bills decrease. Moreover, dollar for dollar, experts consider these programs to be among the most cost-effective investments for utilities to serve their load.

So, what types of programs are available? Depending on your utility, you may be eligible to have an energy efficiency consultant visit your home, have your HVAC system tuned up, or even have your home weatherized. Likewise, specialized energy efficiency and demand response programs may be available to commercial and industrial customers, such as rebates for upgrading to more efficient heating, cooling, and lighting systems, or lower rates for customers who shift energy usage to periods when the electric system has more capacity.

Because the costs of these services may be spread among all customers, many times there is no additional cost for those

taking advantage of them. So, take the advice of The Oklahoma Academy and explore what programs are out there. You can save money, help the environment, and give the grid a break.

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