

View from the Capitol

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By State Rep. Steve Fontana

As co-chairman of the General Assembly's Energy & Technology Committee, I have focused my efforts this year on promoting energy conservation. Given the rising cost of electricity in particular, I would like to share with you several ideas to reduce electricity usage and save money that I have discovered.

When we restructured our electricity infrastructure in 1998, we created a specific fund to promote electricity conservation. This Conservation & Load Management (C&LM) Fund, which electricity ratepayers support, pays for programs that our electric utilities operate to improve electricity conservation.

In our area, United Illuminating (UI) coordinates many of our local conservation programs. According to their literature, they describe their efforts as encouraging "Energy Efficiency – Savings without Sacrifice." This slogan emphasizes that the most important objective of electricity conservation is to use electricity more wisely and reduce costs, both for individual consumers and our system as a whole.

Although there are many types of electricity conservation, I would like to highlight a few prominent methods here. First, UI currently offers all ratepayers the option to apply "time of use" rates to their electricity usage. This voluntary option offers ratepayers the opportunity to pay slightly different electricity rates based on the time of day when they use the most electricity.

For instance, UI offers both a "peak" and an "off-peak" rate under its time of use program for residential customers. If you sign up to participate, you pay a slightly higher electricity rate between 9 AM and 8 PM weekdays, and a slightly lower rate from 8 PM to 9 AM weekdays and on weekends. Therefore, if you can shift any electricity usage from when it costs more (weekdays) to when it costs less (nights and weekends), you can save money.

I recently contacted a UI service representative to ask about joining this program myself. He analyzed my past year's usage, and projected that I could save at least 2% on my electricity bill by signing up. I agreed, and therefore switched, cost-free, to "time of use" rates with my next bill.

Second, UI supports the purchase of energy-efficient lighting through the sale of compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) by retail establishments. These light bulbs use far less electricity, last far longer, and produce much less heat than traditional bulbs.

Since UI underwrites the cost of these bulbs, they are comparably or competitively priced with conventional bulbs. You can find a wide selection of them for all of your lighting

needs at stores like Home Depot. I myself have replaced nearly every light fixture in my house with them over the past year or so, and have seen a resultant decline in my electricity bill as a result.

Third, UI, in conjunction with the federal EnergyStar program, facilitates appliance rebate programs that reduce the cost of home appliances that reduce electricity usage. Depending on the type of appliance that you buy, you can receive from \$35 (for a new window air conditioner) to \$50 (for a new refrigerator or clothes washer) for buying a new EnergyStar appliance.

Finally, if you have a central air conditioner, you can receive up to \$100 by joining the CoolSentry program. Under this initiative (managed by Comverge), homeowners agree to allow the company to attach a control device to their central air unit. This control device allows the company, in the event of a severe power emergency, to reduce the amount of compressor usage in your central air conditioner, thereby lowering overall electricity demand in our electric grid. In return, homeowners receive an immediate cash rebate, and some subsequent, smaller payments.

I contacted the CoolSentry program last year, and Comverge installed a control device on my central air conditioner this past winter. I soon thereafter received a check for \$60 from the company, and anticipate receiving two smaller, further payments in future years.

If you are interested in learning more about time of use rates, CFLs, or appliance rebate programs, you can call UI at 1-800-947-3873 (1-800-WISE-USE), or visit their website at www.uinet.com. If you would like to contact CoolSentry, you can call them at 1-800-717-6697, or visit them at www.coolsentry.com.