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Office of the Regional Administrator
1 Congress Street Boston, MA
02114

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Contact: Peyton Fleming (617-918-1008)

New Hampshire Communities Providing Leadership on Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy

February 10, 2004

By Robert W. Varney

While it hasn't reached the glory of the American Revolution, another revolution is underway across much of the Granite State. And like the epic uprising two centuries ago, this revolution evolves around freedom - freedom from expensive, polluting energy sources.

From biodiesel fuel in Keene, to occupancy sensors in Somersworth to energy-saving lighting in Amherst and Manchester, numerous communities are on a mission to dramatically reduce energy consumption while boosting reliance on clean, renewable sources of energy.

Spurred by the prospect of large savings on energy bills and growing citizen interest in less-polluting energy sources, communities as big as Keene and as small as Amherst are developing formal action plans that document where energy dollars are being spent and where energy reductions and cost savings can be found in buildings, street lights, transportation or trash disposal.

With renewable energy technologies more readily available, communities such as Hanover also are moving aggressively to supplement traditional energy sources with clean-power sources that are being installed in schools and other properties.

These municipal programs are great news for New England's environment because they are reducing the region's reliance on fossil-fuel power plants, which emit greenhouse gas emissions as well as other pollutants that cause elevated smog levels, acid rain and mercury deposition. They're also great news for taxpayers because they are saving money at a time when municipal budgets and school budgets are razor-tight.

Backed with technical and financial assistance from state and federal agencies, as well as local utilities such as Public Service Co. of New Hampshire which have millions of dollars available for energy efficiency programs, the benefits of these energy efficiency and clean energy programs are already widespread. Among the highlights:

* Manchester is saving nearly \$100,000 a year on its energy bills by replacing more than 3,300 traffic lights with energy-efficient light emitting diode (LED) traffic lamps, which use 80 to 90 percent less energy and are certified under EPA's Energy Star Program. The city is also saving tens of thousands of dollars a year on maintenance costs because the LED traffic lights last three to four times longer.

* The Town of Amherst is saving nearly \$20,000 a year on its energy bills by installing energy efficient lighting, occupancy sensors and other equipment upgrades at municipal and school buildings. The town is also saving nearly \$8,000 a year by replacing their streetlights with LED traffic lamps.

* Keene is running all 78 of the city's diesel vehicles on biodiesel fuel. The cleaner fuel, which is 20 percent soybean oil, is reducing the city's greenhouse gas emissions by about 420 tons a year. The city is also saving \$55,000 a year on its electricity bills by capturing methane gas at the landfill and converting it to electricity.

* The Somersworth Housing Authority is saving more than \$45,000 a year on its energy bills thanks to energy-saving lighting and other energy improvements at its 169 housing units. The energy upgrades, completed last fall, were done through a performance contract with an energy services company which guarantees the town at least \$540,000 in energy savings over a 12-year period. The Keene Housing Authority is reaping similar benefits by participating in the project.

* Hanover is installing wood-heating facilities that will use wood chips from local lumber yards to heat the high school and middle school. The heating systems, a first in a New Hampshire public school system, will save the community more than \$60,000 a year on energy bills, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 1,000 tons a year. The facilities will displace about 115,000 gallons of fuel oil each year.

From land use, to transportation to building construction, local governments have major influence and control over energy consumption patterns in this country. That's why the examples above are so important. In addition to providing immediate tangible benefits, they serve as models that other communities can replicate.

*Robert W. Varney is regional administrator of EPA's New England Office in Boston. For more information about energy efficiency programs, including the agency's Energy Star program, visit www.epa.gov/ne/eco/energy.
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