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Efficiency Gains Showcase Utility Efforts

The latest figures show that the Northwest is achieving energy savings at a record pace. Based on a survey of utilities and agencies and a lot of number crunching, officials report the region achieved more energy efficiency in 2010 than ever before in a single year. It's a sign of utilities working hard to meet the demand for energy with programs that promote more efficient use of every kilowatt-hour.

Utilities plan far in advance to ensure they have adequate electricity to meet customer needs. In recent years, utilities have turned to aggressive energy efficiency programs to provide customers with an affordable power supply. Utilities offer everything from residential measures, like sending out compact fluorescent light bulbs to customers, to more complicated commercial offerings, like incentives for upgrades in supermarket refrigeration.

A number of utilities are under the gun to show they are achieving conservation at a rate set by their state legislature. To make sure they are on track, the region's latest survey on energy efficiency is collecting information about what utilities plan to do in the future. This will give resource planners a five-year picture of what the Northwest is likely to achieve annually.

Energy efficiency literally cuts down the need to build new power plants. The 254 megawatts of efficiency achieved in 2010, is about equal to a natural gas-fired power plant. Since 1978, the Northwest has achieved over 4,600 megawatts of energy efficiency. That is enough power to serve four cities the size of Seattle.

While energy efficiency doesn't necessarily make power bills go down, it helps to keep them stable. That is why many utilities faced with increasing costs are gung-ho about efficiency. They see it as a path to a low-cost and low-impact energy future.

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