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News

North Dakotans asked to take the 'switch' challenge

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North Dakotans are being challenged to switch their thinking, to pledge to take small actions that can create a big impact with energy savings. The challenge is part of the NDSwitch campaign funded by the American Recovery Reinvestment Act funds and developed by the North Dakota Department of Commerce to give North Dakotans tools and information to help conserve energy and save money.

"The goal of this campaign is to help people identify simple energy saving actions they can take to reduce energy consumption and have a real affect on the amount of money families spend on energy," Interim Commerce Commissioner Paul Govig said. "The easy-to-use tools in this campaign are intended to improve education and awareness, which are the key steps toward improved energy efficiency."

The campaign includes an online challenge (www.NDSwitch.com) where residents can immediately calculate the benefit of energy-saving actions and add their savings to the North Dakota total.

In addition to the Switch challenge, the NDSwitch website contains an online learning center (www.ndswitch.com/learning-center.php) that features a full curriculum for K-12 teachers with downloadable lesson plans. This resource was introduced to North Dakota teachers at the North Dakota Education Association conference this fall.

Materials and energy-saving ideas for other educators, as well as retailers and workplace managers, are also easily accessible, as well as tips and tools. These areas link to resources already available to help individuals conserve energy use and ultimately save money, such as a Top 10 Home Energy Checklist.

Energy squad videos and a Facebook challenge complete with incentives will be added in 2011. The Facebook page has already been launched.

More than 98 percent of North Dakotans surveyed in developing the campaign expressed interest in saving money and conserving energy. However, they also indicated they won't invest much in terms of time or money to do so. "With this research in mind, the overall strategy of this campaign is to demonstrate that it's easy to use less energy. A little effort can have a big impact," Govig said.

The online calculator (www.ndswitch.com/switch-challenge.php) makes it easy to pledge and understand the impact of simple changes:

- Switching 10 regular bulbs to CFL saves \$163.11/year, which is enough energy to surf the web for 7,949 hours.
- Lowering the thermostat just 4 degrees throughout the winter saves enough energy to run air conditioning for 1,312 hours or to pop 17,493 bags of microwave popcorn.
- If 10,000 North Dakotans pledged to lower their thermostat 4 degrees this winter, the energy saved would be enough to power the State Capitol for 713 days.

The State Capitol Complex has made changes such as these during the past two years resulting in energy cost savings totaling more than \$900,000. The bulk of these savings came from installing more efficient lighting and smarter technology to control the heating and cooling systems.

According to Zachary Weis, State Energy Engineer with the North Dakota Department of Commerce, those upgrades at the Capital Complex will save North Dakota taxpayers more than \$6 million in the next 15 years. Additional annual savings of \$25,000 will be realized with the installation of more lighting upgrades and high-efficiency motors and drives for heating and cooling systems.

The Switch challenge will run throughout 2011.

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