

Energy-efficiency incentives make saving money on utilities even cheaper

Free audits, rebates, tax credits available for local energy customers

By **SEAN HART**
Staff Writer

With cold temperatures on the horizon, now may be the time to upgrade your home's energy efficiency, and there are even incentives available to help reduce the cost.

Not only does increased energy efficiency decrease the cost to heat a home, different projects may also qualify for federal and state tax credits and even cash incentives.

Locally, customers who heat their homes with electricity or natural gas from Umatilla Electric Cooperative, Hermiston Energy Services, Pacific Power or Cascade Natural Gas may be eligible to receive rebates on a variety of different projects.

Umatilla Electric Cooperative and Hermiston Energy

For Umatilla Electric and Hermiston Energy customers who use electricity for heat, Energy Efficiency Program Coordinator Kathy Moore said the first step is to schedule a free energy audit. Umatilla Electric coordinates the audits for both agencies, she said, and appointments can be scheduled, usually within a few days, by calling 541-564-4378.

"When the representative gets to the home, he would identify all the doors and windows and their location," she said. "Then he does several different tests depending on the configuration of the home."

Moore said someone must be available at the home to provide access to the attic and any crawl-space areas. The tests usually take a couple hours, she said, but vary based on what tests are necessary. A duct system test may not be required on a two-story home if the ducts are inside the conditioned space, she said, but a larger home may require more time to check more windows and doors during the standard blower door test.

"It's a piece of equipment he sets up and puts a big fan in frame in a door and then blows air out," she said of the test. "Then he walks through and identifies where air may be infiltrating or leaking into the home. This helps identify what folks could do to better seal up their home."

Some of the improvements are simple, such as weather stripping around a door or caulking around a window. Others are more difficult, she said, and customers can solicit bids from a list of approved technicians who can complete the upgrades.

Rebates are available for insulation and window upgrades through the weatherization program, and the amount is based



PHOTO COURTESY UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Gerardo Villegas, efficiency representative for Umatilla Electric Cooperative, sets up blower door test equipment during an energy audit.

on actual energy savings achieved. Rebates are also available for energy-efficient water heaters, heat pumps and appliances. Moore said Umatilla Electric also allows customers to choose financing instead of a rebate, but Hermiston Energy only offers rebates.

For more information and energy-saving tips, visit umatillaelectric.com/programs/conservation.

Pacific Power electric and Cascade Natural Gas

Customers who heat their homes with Pacific Power electricity or natural gas are eligible for incentives through Energy Trust of Oregon.

Eastern Oregon Outreach Manager Susan Badger-Jones said the organization does not offer free on-site energy audits, but customers can quickly complete a free home energy review online at energytrust.org/residential. Customers can, however, pay to receive a comprehensive home performance assessment from a certified professional.

Energy Trust offers a variety of rebates on insulation, windows, gas fireplaces and heaters, heat pumps, water heaters, solar panels, appliances and more. The organization will also send customers free energy-saving kits for their homes.

Badger-Jones said the utility companies Energy Trust works with have efficiency targets that these programs help meet.

"If they can find ways for people to do the many things they need to do but using less electricity or natural gas to do them, it

means that their infrastructure can go further, yet they can continue to accommodate the additional demand of growth," she said. "People save two ways. If I add insulation to lower my heating bill, I have saved money, but I've also helped other people save money because that (energy company) infrastructure lasts longer, so it's kind of a win-win."

For more information, call 1-866-368-7878 or visit energytrust.org.

State and federal tax incentives

In addition to energy bill savings and rebates, many energy-efficient upgrades qualify for tax credits.

According to the Oregon Department of Energy's 2015 Residential Energy Tax Credit Rates, credits are available for certain energy-efficient water heaters, furnaces, fireplaces, heat pumps, duct sealing, geothermal systems, whole house ventilation systems, stoves, solar and wind power systems and more.

Federal tax credits are also available for geothermal heat pumps, small wind turbines, solar energy systems and fuel cells, according to ENERGY STAR.

For more information about state tax credits, contact the Oregon Department of Energy at 1-800-221-8035 or visit oregon.gov/energy/cons.

For more information about federal tax credits, contact the Internal Revenue Service at 1-800-829-1040 or visit energystar.gov/about/federal_tax_credits.



PHOTO COURTESY UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
Gerardo Villegas of Umatilla Electric Cooperative prepared to conduct a blower door test as part of an energy audit to determine where drafts may exist in a home.

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6. **Irrigon:** 198 W. Columbia Lane
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