

Clean Wisconsin (Founded as Wisconsin's Environmental Decade)
Your environmental voice since 1970.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: December 21, 2005

Contact: Keith Reopelle, Program Director, Ofc: 608-251-7020, ext. 11
Paul Linzmeyer, Bay Towel, Inc., Ofc: 920-497-2000, ext. 125
Kathlyn Hickman: 414-964-1159

Improvements to Energy Efficiency and Renewable Legislation Holds Key to Lower Energy Bills

Madison, WI – Recently introduced Senate Bill 459 holds the promise of major economic and environmental benefits for Wisconsin by increasing investments in renewable energy resources and energy efficiency programs proven to save ratepayers money. Faced with rising fuels costs, energy efficiency is one of the few options available to policy makers to combat rising energy bills. Increasing the investments in Focus on Energy, the state's energy efficiency program, is key to a clean, affordable and balanced energy future for Wisconsin.

"Increasing the investment in energy efficiency programs, such as Focus on Energy, is one of the fastest and only ways to get control of rising electric and heating bills," stated Keith Reopelle, Clean Wisconsin Program Director. "Investments in these programs already save businesses and home owners \$3 for every \$1 spent."

The average 2004 retail price of electricity in Wisconsin was 9.07 cents/kilowatt hour for residential ratepayers, 7.24 cents/kwh for commercial ratepayers and 4.93 cents for industrial ratepayers. The cost of meeting electric energy demand through the Focus on Energy efficiency programs last year was 1 cent/kwh. The most conservative estimate would be that meeting demand through efficiency is at least 3 to 4 times less expensive for ratepayers than it is to meet that same demand by generating electricity at coal-burning power plants.

"At Bay Towel, the cost of utilities is a significant part of my budget, with rising costs, now is the time for the government to invest more into energy efficiency programs. Wisconsin ratepayers are currently paying 3 times more than necessary for part of our energy bills," said Paul Linzmeyer, President Bay Towel, Inc. located in Green Bay, Wisconsin. "I don't want to pay 3 times more than needed. I want the state to invest more in energy efficiency."

Residents of Wisconsin on a fixed income will be hit the hardest this heating season because bills are expected to increase between 50 and 100 percent. "Seniors and people on a fixed income are hit the hardest by rising energy costs," said Kathlyn Hickman, homeowner in Shorewood. "Focus on Energy helped us purchase a high-efficiency furnace that helped keep our heating cost in check."

Focus on Energy offers rebates for businesses and residents who invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. During 2005 Focus on Energy assisted farmers to install digestive systems that turn manure into an energy source. "By investing in more renewables, Wisconsin farmers will realize the economic and job creation benefits versus importing fossil fuels and giving those benefits to another state," stated farmer John Vrieze, President of Dairy Business Association. "Our digester system is producing 60 – 65 cubic feet per cow per day of methane. Farming is a business and it's getting harder to make a profit as energy costs continue to soar. Renewable energy is a good supplemental income for farmers."

Components of Senate Bill 459 include:

- A requirement that utilities generate 10 percent of their electricity from renewable resources by 2015.
- A restructuring to increase investment in the state's energy efficiency program, known as Focus on Energy.
- Increased energy efficiency requirements in commercial building codes and state facilities.

- More -

Based on the bi-partisan Governor's Task Force on Energy Efficiency and Renewables recommendations to put Wisconsin on a cleaner, more balanced energy path, SB 459 is a good starting point but Reopelle pointed out that, several changes are needed to realize the economic and environmental savings potential of a strong state energy efficiency investment.

According to Clean Wisconsin, critical changes needed in the bill include:

Increased Investment in Energy Efficiency – Increased Dollar Savings

As introduced the bill caps energy efficiency investments at its current level of \$63 million per year. Much greater electric and heating bill savings are possible if the PSC is allowed to set energy efficiency investment levels based on availability of low-cost efficiency program opportunities. These programs have been saving businesses and homeowners \$3 for every \$1 invested; so a \$125 million investment will save ratepayers \$375 million on their gas and electric bills.

Securing Energy Efficiency Funds from Budget Raids

The bill needs to be tightened so that energy efficiency program dollars cannot be diverted to balance the state budget. Investments in energy efficiency should be treated the same as investments in power plants and transmission lines.

“Clean Wisconsin is committed to working with the legislature to make the changes necessary so that this bill will help the maximum number of homeowners and businesses bring down their electric and heating bills in the future,” stated Reopelle. “Wisconsin’s legislature currently has a unique opportunity with the drafting and forthcoming passing of this energy bill; leaders can either steer Wisconsin towards smart planning for a balanced energy future, or they can ignore the inefficient use of energy and price volatility going on around them.”

Wisconsin’s Public Benefits Program is a statewide energy efficiency and renewable energy initiative offering programs and services for residential and business customers as well as an environmental research program. With more than 220,000 participants in 2005, the program helped saved home owners and businesses more then \$26 million. Some of the most popular and effective Focus on Energy programs that have helped homeowners and businesses reduce costs to date include rebates to install more efficiency furnaces and air conditioners, home and business energy audits with subsequent retrofits, and rebates to switch to high efficiency compact fluorescent lighting.

Clean Wisconsin, an environmental advocacy organization, protects Wisconsin’s clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and corporations accountable. Founded in 1970 as Wisconsin’s Environmental Decade, Clean Wisconsin exposes corporate polluters, makes sure existing environmental laws are enforced, and educates citizens and businesses. On behalf of its 10,000 members and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. Phone: 608-251-7020, Fax: 608-251-1655, Email: info@cleanwisconsin.org, Website: www.cleanwisconsin.org.

###

Additional Publications:

http://www.cleanwisconsin.org/publications/index.html#air_energy