

Lansing has its eyes on Plymouth

By Teri Benas
staff writer

The Plymouth Energy Program (PEP) has sent sparks flying in Lansing. The year-old program which informs residents about energy savings in town hall-style gatherings recently was selected, in part, as a statewide model, says John Behman, PEP coordinator.

The program started here last year as a national pilot program with a \$23,000 federal grant. The state's interest in Plymouth's experiences elsewhere. So far, Inkster and Grand Haven have started similar programs.

At least 10 other Michigan communities are on record as planning to start a low-cost community energy savings program, said Jan Patrick, the community energy management coordinator for the Michigan Energy Administration.

Ms. Patrick says these communities plan to utilize one of the more popular features in PEP, that is, the use of infra-red photography to record energy waste.

Behman admits photos that show escaping heat has helped to generate community interest here.

The entire community was photographed last year, and these pictures have been viewed on request by residents as well as at public meetings.

The program consisted of photographing 4,300 buildings in Plymouth, at a per-building cost of \$6.23.

Behman says the program's successes here have encouraged the state's application of the program elsewhere.

"MOST ENERGY outreach programs are considered successful if they generate a 10-20 percent annual response rate from residents," he says.

"In Plymouth we got a 40 percent turnout in just the first 3 1/2 months."

That figure represents 1,100 out of more than 2,700 homeowners.

Behman says state officials have been monitoring the Plymouth program since it started last March. In subsequent months, he's attended training programs for other community officials in Lansing to teach them about administering such a program.

He has also served as a consultant to the Michigan Energy Administration, a branch of the Department of Commerce.

In September, Behman will travel to Ottawa, Ontario, where he'll present a synopsis of PEP to a gathering of international experts on energy as well as governmental officials.

The symposium, called Thermo Sense IV, is sponsored by four international organizations, including the Society for Optical Engineers, the American Society of Photogrammetry and the Canadian Infrared Thermo-graphic Association.

In addition to addressing representatives from the U.S. and Canada, Behman will also address representatives from a bevy of European and Asian countries.

In a speech he has written for that four-day conference, he'll make these points about succeeding with a locally based energy savings program.

• Behman believes that a community approach to reducing energy consumption is the most effective route in comparison to federal and state efforts through tax credits.

• Change, he says, is most rapid among people who know one another. In a community of under 10,000 people, small neighborhood gatherings were successful in attracting residents. Residents then were able to view infrared photos of their homes and pick up printed material on adjusting one's home for energy savings.

• "For a conservation program to be successful," he wrote, "Large numbers of people must be reached in as intimate setting as possible."

• He also points out that people are less apt to reduce energy consumption for purely ideological conservation purposes. Instead, he says, people will reduce their energy consumption when they know it will "save them money."

Behman presently is seeking another \$10,000 grant to keep PEP running through the fall.

He plans to expand the program into commercial and industrial areas of the community. He's now shooting for a 60 percent community response rate.

"The topic of energy savings is so new that people just don't know what to do about it, particularly in light of rising utility costs," he says.



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