



NEWS

Lobbying for Energy Efficiency

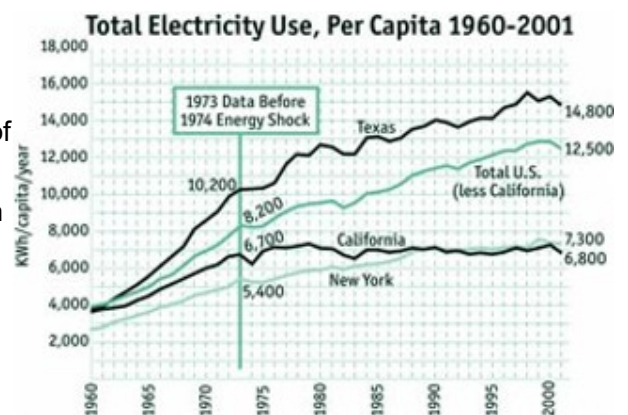
Coalition aims to reduce state's electricity consumption and costs through expanded utility efficiency programs

BY DANIEL MOTTOLA, FRI., JUNE 16, 2006



If scientists' stark **climate change** warnings aren't enough to move people toward more efficient ways of using energy, then, as costs rise, the financial drain on businesses' bottom lines and individuals' pocketbooks surely will. That's what founders of new coalition **Efficiency Texas** had largely on their brains, anyway. The coalition's aim is to reduce electricity consumption and costs through expanded utility efficiency programs – creating incentives and cost-recovery measures for the state's regulated, investor-owned utilities to go beyond the small amount of efficiency currently mandated. Efficiency Texas, hatched at local energy lobbying and consulting firm **Good Company Associates**, includes statewide environmental and business groups representing more than four million people, the managers of more than 661 million square feet of commercial space, and **Texas Impact**, an interfaith nonprofit. "Energy efficiency programs are a popular, cost-effective and pragmatic way to curb escalating energy demand, and with a stressed electric power grid and shrinking reserve margins, energy efficiency has never been more important," said **Robert J. King**, president of Good Company, in a statement.

The **Texas Electric Restructuring Act (SB7) of 1999** requires investor-owned electric utilities to offer energy-efficiency programs to meet at least 10% of their annual electric load growth. But ET Director **Mark Stover** says utilities aren't exceeding that minimum, and their efficiency programs – such as tree-planting programs and subsidies for more efficient air conditioning and lighting – are oversubscribed and underfunded, leaving economic and environmental benefits unrealized. With more **efficiency spending**, like that of California and New York for example (see chart), electricity use per capita can remain flat as populations swell; efficiency spending, said Stover, can also offset



Texas' explosive growth and hot climate, matched with what the Efficiency Texas Coalition calls inadequate spending on efficiency programs, has caused the state's per capita energy use to rise well past the national average. In 2004, 448,020,000 kilowatt hours of electricity demand – enough yearly power for 38,174 homes – was saved through efficiency programs. Since 2002, Texas utilities spent approximately \$67 million per year on efficiency programs, which pales in comparison to the average \$286 million per year their California counterparts spend during the same period, keeping electricity load growth there relatively flat. According to Efficiency Texas, California utilities will spend \$714 million a year on efficiency from 2006-2008.

the need for new power plants. Texas is poised to add 15 new coal plants, angering clean-air advocates, who say up to 50% of new energy demand can be met with increased efficiency.

Other energy policy watchdogs aren't as enthused with Efficiency Texas' plans. **Carol Biedrzycki of Texas Ratepayers' Organization to Save Energy** said, "All energy efficiency doesn't have equivalent benefits. The highest benefits to consumers and the environment is energy efficiency that reduces overall energy use." Biedrzycki has long been an opponent of Good Company Associates' lobbying on behalf of **advanced metering technology**, which uses price signals to discourage peak-time power usage, something she says merely shifts the times energy is used. Biedrzycki fears that advanced metering – as opposed to energy saving tactics like replacing appliances with high-efficiency models and building weatherization – will have too big a role with the new coalition.

Efficiency Texas has set about its work amid the high-profile **Texas Public Utility Commission** case against **CenterPoint Energy**, in which PUC staff members have alleged \$105 million in overcharges to Houston-area customers in 2004. If CenterPoint is ordered to return money, ET wants it to be in the form of juiced-up efficiency programs. Stover expects to lobby other major utilities appearing before the PUC this year also. "We want the financial incentives of our regulated utilities like CenterPoint to be aligned with desires of consumers seeking the benefits of efficiency programs," he said, adding that the coalition may approach the PUC or the state Legislature in the future. "Texas leads the nation in energy use," he said. "Isn't it time for Texas to become the leader in energy efficiency?"

More of the Story

Naked City

Headlines and happenings from Austin and beyond

Weapon Against Cervical Cancer Approved

Food and Drug Administration announces approval of vaccine that prevents cervical cancer and genital warts caused by human papilloma virus

Fighting the Sex War

Christina Page, author of *How the Pro-Choice Movement Saved America: Freedom, Politics and the War on Sex*, visits Austin

Weed Watch: DPS Says Drug Seizures Up

Troopers collect \$160 million worth of cocaine, methamphetamine, and marijuana, department reports

Maxey Helps Dems Rebuild

Former state-representative- turned-political-consultant offers his grassroots organizer skills to help Texas Democratic Party get it together

Abbott Spanks Spammers

AG secures more than \$10 million settlement against former UT-student-turned-super-spammer Ryan Pitylak and partners

Anthony Graves Update

Seeking to overturn a lower court's ruling that death row inmate Anthony Graves must be given a new trial by Sept. 12, AG's office files final appeal to U.S. Supreme Court

As The Transportation Policy Turns, Latest Episode

The great Central Texas toll roads drama continues to unfold

Water Management: Swimming in Policy

Governor-appointed committee outlines water policy issues it intends to prioritize

On the Water Front

Austin Water Utility and EPA announce new labeling program for high-efficiency products

A note to readers: Bold and uncensored, *The Austin Chronicle* has been Austin's independent news source for almost 40 years, expressing the community's political and environmental concerns and supporting its active

cultural scene. Now more than ever, we need your support to continue supplying Austin with independent, free press. If real news is important to you, please consider making a donation of \$5, \$10 or whatever you can afford, to help keep our journalism on stands.

SUPPORT THE *CHRONICLE* →

READ MORE

MORE BY DANIEL MOTTOLA



Bicycle Master Plan Gets a Tune-Up

If it's May, it must be Bike Month

MAY 22, 2009



Critical Mass Arrests

Pride or policy?

APRIL 10, 2009

KEYWORDS FOR THIS STORY

energy consumptionenergy efficiency, climate change, Efficiency Texas, Good Company Associates, Texas Impact, Robert J. King, Texas Electric Restructuring Act, SB7, Mark Stover, Carol Biedrzycki, Texas Ratepayers' Organization to Save Energy, advanced metering technology, Texas Public Utility Commission, Centerpoint Energy

MORE IN THE ARCHIVES

ALSO ON THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

Election Ticker: Are We There Yet?

14 days ago • 14 comments

The latest – and last! – ne...
from the campaign trail
before Election Day

Coming Out of the Ashes

7 days ago • 10 comments

After Election 2020, it's not
right, but it's OK

Top 20 Austin Breweries of 2020

7 hours ago • 2 comments

It's time for our annual
Central Texas Brewery
Power Rankings

All The C

20 days ago

All The Cs
Mon., Oct.
Editor, I co

0 Comments The Austin Chronicle  Disqus' Privacy Policy

 1 Login ▾

 Recommend  Tweet  Share

Sort by Best ▾



Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

Name

Be the first to comment.

 Subscribe  Add Disqus to your siteAdd DisqusAdd  Do Not Sell My Data

PHOTO GALLERIES



AUSTIN FC STADIUM CONSTRUCTION PROGRESS

MORE PHOTO GALLERIES >

NEWSLETTERS

Your Email Address

Subscribe to All

One click gets you all the newsletters listed below

Chronicle Daily

Breaking news, arts coverage, and daily events

Chron Events

Can't keep up with happenings around town? We can help.

Qmmunity

Austin's queerest news and events

Chronicle Cooking

New recipes and food news delivered Mondays

Luv Doc Answers

All questions answered (satisfaction not guaranteed)

SUBSCRIBE