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"These days, saving energy makes sense for any household Budget. Energy conservation is also the first step we need to take to reach energy independence, solve climate change and build local economic prosperity."

— Ben Brouwer,  
Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO)

May 2010

## Helena Launches Green Blocks Pilot Project

This spring, Helena residents will have the opportunity to participate in a conservation pilot project that will save them both money and energy. NorthWestern Energy has partnered with the City of Helena to provide energy audits and some energy conservation measures free of charge to participating households.

Through an application process, the City will choose 100 homes in two-block clusters from different neighborhoods around Helena. In these areas, NorthWestern Energy will first conduct an energy audit for each participating household and then deploy contractors to install energy-saving measures in Helena homes. All improvements and advice will be provided at no charge by NorthWestern Energy. The average value of improvements to individual homes will range from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

Energy efficiency measures installed as part of the Green Blocks Pilot program may include

insulation, weatherstripping, low-flow showerheads, programmable thermostats and compact fluorescent light bulbs. After installation, NorthWestern Energy will track energy use for at least one year to note any benefits and changes in energy consumption. Individual and household information will remain confidential and only generalized data will be used to assess the program.

"I think we'll all learn a lot from this project about low-cost energy conservation steps that save energy and cut our community-wide greenhouse gas emissions," said City Manager Ron Alles. "It is one more Climate Change Task Force recommendation that the City is pursuing."

The Helena Green Blocks Pilot project was one of the recommendations of the Helena Climate Action Plan and is based on a similar project that the City of Missoula undertook in 2008. The model draws heavily on Northwestern Energy's existing efficiency programs that already include

home energy audits, and rebates for efficiency materials.

Montana's Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO), a sustainable energy and agriculture non-profit organization based in Helena, is pitching in to help manage the project, recruit participating households and, provide other educational resources on how to cut household energy consumption. "These days, saving energy makes sense for any household budget," said Ben Brouwer, AERO's Energy Program Manager. "Energy conservation is also the first step we need to take to reach energy independence, solve climate change and build local economic prosperity. "

More information on the Green Blocks Pilot project, the application, and accompanying forms can be found on the city's website at [www.ci.helena.mt.us/](http://www.ci.helena.mt.us/) or Questions can also be directed to Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director, at 447-8445.

**25x'25** is a renewable energy initiative backed by organizations and individuals united by a common interest in making America's energy future more secure, affordable and environmentally sustainable.

Through the 25x'25 Alliance, partners are working together to advance renewable energy solutions from our nation's farms, ranches and other working lands. 25x'25 is supported by the Energy Future Coalition and is led by a committee composed of volunteer leaders from the agricultural, forestry and renewable energy communities.

Learn more at:

[http://  
www.25x25.org](http://www.25x25.org)

## NorthWestern Energy Sponsors ENERGY STAR Homes Workshop

Builders, real estate agents, appraisers, insulators, HVAC workers, home buyers — anyone interested in building, marketing or buying an energy efficient home — is invited to attend several free workshops that NorthWestern Energy is sponsoring throughout the state.

The *Northwest ENERGY STAR® Qualified Homes (NWEH)* program is the most widely used and respected above energy code program in the country. At the workshops, information will be presented on a version of the *ENERGY STAR Qualified Homes* program specifically designed for the four Northwest states — including Montana. A NWEH home is typically 15-30 percent more efficient than a regular home built to code.

Part One of the workshop

will explain how ENERGY STAR is related to the recently revised Montana Energy Code. Part Two will address ENERGY STAR and green building standards; such as the National Green Building Standard, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Model Green Home Building Guidelines, and LEED for Homes.

The *ENERGY STAR Qualified Homes* program results in healthier, more comfortable and more energy efficient homes. The program also assists builders to market better homes through a combination of technical support and regional marketing.

The workshop schedule is:

- **Tuesday, May 18** — Bozeman Residence Inn, 6195 E Valley Center Road, Bozeman
- **Wednesday, May 19** —

NorthWestern Energy Billings Service Center, 1944 Monad Road, Billings

- **Thursday, May 20** — NorthWestern Energy Great Falls Service Center, 1501 North River Road, Black Eagle
- **Wednesday, May 26** — NorthWestern Energy Helena Service Center, 1315 North Last Chance Gulch, Helena
- **Wednesday, June 2** — NorthWestern Energy Missoula Service Center, 1801 S Russell Street, Missoula

There is no charge to attend the workshop, but pre-registration is requested. To register, contact Buzz Alexander at (406) 880-2622 or e-mail: [buzza@ncat.org](mailto:buzza@ncat.org).

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## Mark Your Calendars

Here's a sample of the many upcoming events focusing on energy issues. For a more complete list, see our Events Calendar at <http://montanagreenpower.com/calendar.php>

### NorthWestern Energy Renewable Energy Installer Training

April 27, 2010, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NorthWestern Energy Division Office, Butte

This is the first of the two required training sessions for yet-to-be qualified Renewable Energy (RE) installers seeking NorthWestern Energy (NWE) USB Funding. The topics in this specific session cannot be made up through a third-party trainer. Much of the information in the session is specific to the NWE USB program, utility safety, and interconnection requirements. If you are seeking to be qualified, don't miss this training! RSVP to John Jones at 406-465-5206.

### [NABCEP Certificate of Knowledge Prep Course and Exam](#)

June 3-5, 2010

East Norriton, PA

This intensive 3-day course is designed to prepare individuals with a basic level of electrical knowledge and general understanding of Photovoltaics for the North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners (NABCEP) Entry Level Certificate of Knowledge exam. The class will cover the Learning Objective as provided by NABCEP during the first two days and will conclude with a review session and the Entry Level examination on the third day.

## U.S. Solar Industry Reports Strong Growth in 2009

The U.S. solar industry reported strong growth in 2009, overcoming harsh economic conditions to post a 36percent increase in revenues, which totaled \$4 billion.

The Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA) released its 2009 annual report on April 15, showing that overall U.S. solar electric capacity grew by 37 percent, doubling the size of the residential photovoltaic (PV) market and adding three new concentrating solar power (CSP) plants. Residential grid-tied PV installations showed the strongest growth, jumping from 78 megawatts (MW) to 156 MW.



The industry group said state and federal policy support, along with reductions in technology costs, helped boost the industry, while creating 17,000 new jobs nationwide. SEIA said signs are pointing to a continued strong showing in 2010 for the U.S. solar industry.

According to SEIA, California's 220 megawatts (MW) of new solar capacity led the United States in 2009, trailed by New Jersey at a distant second with 57 MW. In terms of new solar capacity per capita in 2009, Hawaii was the leader with 10.4 watts, while Nevada has the most cumulative solar electric

capacity per capita, at 38 watts.

Internationally, the United States ranked fourth in new solar electric capacity in 2009 with 481 MW,

behind Germany's 3,000 MW, Italy's 700 MW, and Japan's 484 MW. See the SEIA press release at [http://www.seia.org/cs/news\\_detail?pressrelease.id=786](http://www.seia.org/cs/news_detail?pressrelease.id=786) and the full report at <http://seia.org/galleries/default-file/2009%20Solar%20Industry%20Year%20in%20Review.pdf>.

The industry results were reflected in the results of U.S. thin-film solar module manufacturer First Solar, Inc., which topped the rankings for PV module suppliers in 2009, shipping more than a gigawatt (GW) of modules.

According to IMS Research, First Solar moved up from second to first place, overtaking Suntech Power Holdings Company. Overall, the top ten firms increased their module shipments by 75 percent in 2009. Globally, PV installations reached a record high of 6.43 GW in 2009, a 6 percent increase over the previous year, according to the annual PV market report issued by Solarbuzz.

This newsletter is a monthly feature of the Montana Green Power website. The website is funded with Universal System Benefits charges paid by all NorthWestern Energy customers.

**MONTANA**  
GreenPower

Visit the website at [www.MontanaGreenPower.com](http://www.MontanaGreenPower.com) for more information on solar, wind, bioenergy, energy efficiency, and other topics.

Have a renewable energy tip or some news you want to share? Send it [info@montanagreenpower.com](mailto:info@montanagreenpower.com).

## Funding Opportunities: Rural Energy for America Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture requests proposals for Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Improvements, under the Rural Energy for America Program.

This RFP will provide support to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to purchase and install renewable energy systems and make energy efficiency improvements .

Eligible applicants are agricultural producers and rural small businesses. All agricultural producers, including farmers and ranchers, who gain 50 percent or more of their gross income from the agricultural operations are eligible. Small businesses that are located in a rural area can also apply. Rural electric cooperatives may also be eligible to apply.

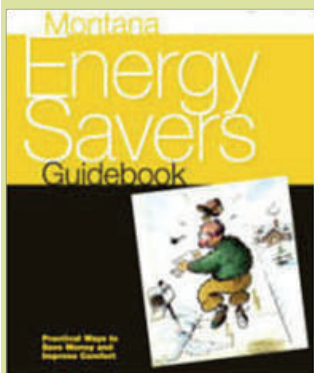
Eligible projects include:

retrofitting lighting or insulation, or purchasing or replacing equipment with more efficient units. Eligible renewable energy projects include projects that produce energy from wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, hydro power and hydrogen-based sources. All projects must be located in a rural area, must be technically feasible, and must be owned by the applicant.

Grants are awarded on a

competitive basis and can be up to 25 percent of total eligible project costs. Grants are limited to \$500,000 for renewable energy systems and \$250,000 for energy efficiency improvements.

Application deadline is June 30, 2010. For more information, visit <http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?mode=VIEW&opId=54175>.



### Montana Energy Savers Guidebook

Wise use of energy allows Montana homeowners to save money, conserve natural resources, and reduce pollution, while creating a more comfortable indoor living space. Most Montanans could reduce their energy consumption from 10 to 30 percent by taking actions described in this booklet, produced by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The booklet includes a useful checklist that can help you plan your most cost-effective energy conservation plan for your home.

<http://deq.mt.gov/Energy/pdf/MTEG10-2008.pdf>

## Question of the Month

### What are the features of ENERGY STAR qualified new homes?

To earn the ENERGY STAR, a home must meet guidelines for energy efficiency set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These homes are at least 15 percent more energy efficient than homes built to the [International Residential Code \(IRC\)](#), and include additional energy-saving features that typically make them 20–30 percent more efficient than standard homes.

And with homebuyers increasingly interested in green building, energy efficiency is the place to start. That's because the energy used in homes often comes from the burning of fossil fuels at power plants, which contributes to smog, acid rain, and risks of global warming. So, the less energy used, the less air pollution generated. And the easy way to make sure a new home is energy efficient is to look for the blue ENERGY STAR mark, the government-backed symbol for energy efficiency.

Any home three stories or less can earn the ENERGY STAR label if it has been verified to meet EPA's guidelines, including: single family, attached, and low-rise multi-family homes; manufactured homes; systems-built homes (e.g., SIP, ICF, or modular construction); log homes, concrete homes; and even existing

retrofitted homes.

ENERGY STAR qualified homes can include a variety of 'tried-and-true' energy-efficient features that contribute to improved home quality and homeowner comfort, and to lower energy demand and reduced air pollution:

#### 1. Effective Insulation

Properly installed and inspected insulation in floors, walls, and attics ensures even temperatures throughout the house, reduced energy use, and increased comfort.

#### 2. High-Performance Windows

Energy-efficient windows employ advanced technologies, such as protective coatings and improved frames, to help keep heat in during winter and out during summer. These windows also block damaging ultraviolet sunlight that can discolor carpets and furnishings.

#### 3. Tight Construction and Ducts

Sealing holes and cracks in the home's "envelope" and in heating and cooling duct systems helps reduce drafts, moisture, dust, pollen, and noise. A tightly sealed home improves comfort and indoor air quality while reducing utility and maintenance.

#### 4. Efficient Heating and Cooling Equipment

In addition to using less energy to operate, energy-efficient heating and cooling systems can be qui-

eter, reduce indoor humidity, and improve the overall comfort of the home. When properly installed into a tightly sealed home, this equipment won't have to work so hard to heat and cool the home.

#### 5. Efficient Products

ENERGY STAR qualified homes may also be equipped with ENERGY STAR qualified products — lighting fixtures, compact fluorescent bulbs, ventilation fans, and appliances, such as refrigerators, dishwashers, and washing machines.

#### 6. Third-Party Verification

With the help of independent Home Energy Raters, ENERGY STAR builder partners choose the most appropriate energy-saving features for their homes. Additionally, raters conduct onsite testing and inspections to verify the energy efficiency measures, as well as insulation, air tightness, and duct sealing details.

