

## Stimulus Boosts State Energy Efficiency Efforts

by Mikel Chavers

South Carolina's move to green has been mainly for economic development.

The state doesn't produce any coal, natural gas or oil and must import those resources.

"So when we spend money on traditional fossil fuels, apart from the environmental impact, this is a drain on the South Carolina economy. We spend \$20 billion a year on energy," John F. Clark, director of the South Carolina Energy Office, said.

"When we push doing things green ... our main focus is economic."

South Carolina, like other states, is getting help in its energy efforts from the federal stimulus package. The recession isn't slowing energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives. Those are more important than ever in this economy, state energy office officials said.

"As money becomes tighter, in fact the need to conserve becomes greater," said Seth Efron, spokesman for the North Carolina Energy Office.

"In this economy, energy costs are going up," said Clark. People can't pay the upfront costs for energy efficiency projects, he said.

That's why South Carolina is using 80 percent of the stimulus funds under the state energy program to improve energy efficiency in public buildings with projects like replacing old lights with energy efficient ones and upgrading to efficient heating and air systems. That amounts to \$40 million of the total \$50 million in stimulus funding, according to Clark.

To do that, the state uses a revolving loan fund for the projects, where loan payments go back into the fund, replenishing it for years to come. Clark said there's more interest in the state's revolving loan fund than ever before.

In New Hampshire, to understate it, the state energy office is having a busy year, according to Karen Rantamaki, the state energy manager.

Although her office isn't able to hire additional staff because of the down economy, its two-year budget ballooned from \$250,000 to \$3 million this biennium, Rantamaki said. With \$10 million in stimulus funding, the budget for energy efficiency projects is \$13 million.

In North Carolina, the state made sure that along with stimulus funding for energy-efficient public buildings, there were folks on hand to help state agencies, local governments and public schools develop energy audits—a foundation for determining the scope and direction of any energy efficiency improvements.



### SUN POWERED

Solar panels on homes are not that unusual. In fact a study released earlier this year shows that most homeowners would consider installing green energy systems such as solar panels or small wind turbines if they were paid enough cash. Some states are taking it a step further—they're installing solar panels on capitols to provide some of the energy for those buildings.

Photo: Niall Carson/PA Wire URN: 8269177/© 2010 The Associated Press

In just three months from January to March, the state provided technical assistance to nearly 300 local governments and educational institutions, all to help them plan how to save money through energy efficiency, according to Efron.

That's a huge testament to the surge in interest, said Efron.

And even after stimulus funding dries up next year, the show must go on.

In North Carolina, based on a 2002 law, state buildings must reduce the amount of energy used by 20 percent this year and by 30 percent by 2015.

South Carolina is operating under a similar mandate. Under a law passed in 2008, South Carolina is required to reduce energy use in schools, state colleges and universities and state agencies by 20 percent. The state lagged other states in adopting such a mandate, in part because it historically has had lower energy costs.

"And in the world of energy conservation and efficiency, a lot is driven by the cost of energy," Clark said. "Rising energy costs have made people in South Carolina and probably in the Southeast look at energy issues a lot differently than before."