



## Energy program could help local residents save

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Blaine residents will soon be getting information on how to save money in heating and electricity costs tucked in alongside their regular utility bills.

Sustainable Connections of Bellingham partnered with the Opportunity Council to implement the community energy challenge in Blaine over the next few weeks, said Alex Ramel, the energy and policy manager for Sustainable Connections.

Every Blaine resident's February utility bill will be mailed with a pamphlet containing information on how home and business owners can participate in the challenge and work to reduce their energy usage and carbon footprint, Ramel explained.

"We are offering a one-stop-shop for energy efficiency, providing homes and small businesses throughout Whatcom County with information, technical expertise, financial assistance, and quality assurance to cut back energy use and start saving," Ramel said.

The first step in participation in the challenge is signing up with Opportunity Council for a home energy use assessment, which costs \$195, Ramel said. If the home or business owners proceed with the suggested energy efficiency improvements, whether it's improved insulation, furnace and water heater replacements, or solar panel installation, \$95 of the initial costs will be credited to the cost of the improvements, he said.

Since the program's beginning in July 2010, Ramel said 69 home improvement projects and 41 business improvement projects have been completed in Whatcom County. Nine homes in the Blaine and Birch Bay communities have undergone an energy use assessment and two homes have completed efficiency improvements projects, Ramel added. He estimates the homes that have completed improvement projects will save about 29 percent on their energy bills.

In addition to the assessment, Sustainable Connections will connect home or business owners with contractors trained in energy efficiency and may provide low-interest loans for the improvement projects through Banner Bank.

For more information on the community energy challenge, visit [www.communityenergychallenge.org](http://www.communityenergychallenge.org) or call 360/676-6099.

