



THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

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EPA gives Bellingham \$350,000 grant for climate change project

KIE RELYEA - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

BELLINGHAM - The city has received a \$350,000 federal grant for a project to reduce carbon emissions by reducing energy use.

The money comes from the Environmental Protection Agency through its new Climate Showcase Communities program. Bellingham is among the first cities in the nation to be awarded such a grant - becoming one out of 25 to receive the money from a pool of 450 applicants, according to a city news release.

EPA wants grant money spent on initiatives to help the planet by helping to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, a major contributor to climate change.

The city will use the money to partner with organizations for outreach and education for the Community Energy Challenge project, which is a three-year effort in Whatcom County to increase energy efficiency and reduce utility bills for homeowners and small businesses while creating jobs.

The challenge is collaboration with Sustainable Connections, Opportunity Council, Puget Sound Energy and RE Sources for Sustainable Communities.

The countywide project started this year. It has a number of pieces that include:

- Providing energy audits to 1,800 residences and 150 businesses to reduce use of electricity and natural gas. The goal is for homeowners to cut the amount of energy their homes use by up to 30 percent, and up to 15 percent for businesses.

- Creating a revolving loan fund totaling \$1.25 million - to which the city of Bellingham, Whatcom County and all six small cities in the county have contributed - to finance conservation projects that will grow out of the energy audits. The money will be used to partially back loans provided by private banks.

- Creating 35 local jobs. Training contractors who want to be certified in retrofit work that focuses on weatherization and energy efficiency. Generating more than \$10 million in construction activity.

- Setting up a one-stop shop to serve homeowners of all income levels and small businesses. The shop will offer help with energy information, audits that show how buildings are using energy, retrofits to buildings and equipment to make them more energy-efficient, utility rebates, tax credits, contractor services, and financing through the revolving loan program.

- Motivating students, teachers and administrators in school-wide initiatives to reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases through the Cool School Challenge, which is a program of the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency.

Funding for the challenge comes from a variety of sources, such as federal dollars, including stimulus money, and utilities through their existing energy-efficiency programs.

By 2012, the Community Energy Challenge will cut the amount of carbon emissions equivalent to taking 1,378 passenger cars off the road, with much of those reductions lasting for years.

LEARN MORE

- Details about the Community Energy Challenge program is available online at communityenergychallenge.org.

- Alex Ramel, energy and policy manager with Sustainable Connections, will talk about the challenge at 7 p.m. March 10 in the upstairs classroom at the RE Store, 2309 Meridian St. in Bellingham. The event is part of the monthly meeting of the Bellingham chapter of Solar Washington.

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