

Who We Are

Alliance aims to increase access to energy efficiency information and resources for Chicago region residents and business owners

Energy Impact Illinois helps residents, multi-family building owners, and businesses lower energy bills and increase the comfort of their spaces by providing resources and information on energy-saving improvements and the rebates, loans and financing options available for those projects.

The coalition was formed as the result of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings Neighborhood Program to spur energy efficiency upgrades and create a long-term energy efficiency market in the region.

Specific Programs:

For residents and homeowners: Energy Impact Illinois provides smart, simplified access to information, financial resources and contractor resources at TheEnergyBills.org that empower people to make smart choices about what type of energy bill they want to receive. Resources include information about home energy efficiency improvements that will help them save money on their energy bills, as well as a free MyHomeEQ calculator that offers personalized energy efficient actions homeowners can take, and the financing and contractor resources available to make them happen.

For multifamily building owners: Energy Savers connects building owners with tools to assess energy usage, financing options, construction oversight and annual energy performance reports.

For commercial property owners and businesses: Energy Impact Illinois provides commercial building owners and managers with the tools, resources and financing needed to make impactful energy improvements to their buildings. The program also will offer a personalized energy calculator to accurately assess the energy savings that will result from implementing energy efficiency projects. In addition, it links these organizations to relevant utility programs.

For government and non-profits: Energy Impact Illinois offers a special financing program tailored to government and nonprofit organizations through IFF, a nonprofit lender and real estate consultant, to invest in energy efficiency. In addition, it links these organizations to relevant utility programs.

For contractors: Energy Impact Illinois supports the Illinois Home Performance with Energy Star criteria for contractor qualification, and looks for well-qualified home energy assessment and home energy upgrade contractors to join our program.

ALLIANCE PARTNERS:



Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning



Northern Illinois Energy Project

How We Can Work Together

Energy Impact Illinois has a number of resources that will be beneficial to your constituents, including:

1. Website resources. Our customizable widgets are easy to include on your website. <http://energyimpactillinois.org/partners/>

WIDGET PREVIEW

Do you want to lower your energy bills but don't know where to begin? This tool prioritizes energy efficiency improvements based on expected savings, upfront cost and environmental benefit. Click on any of the solutions to learn more about your options.

Zip Code

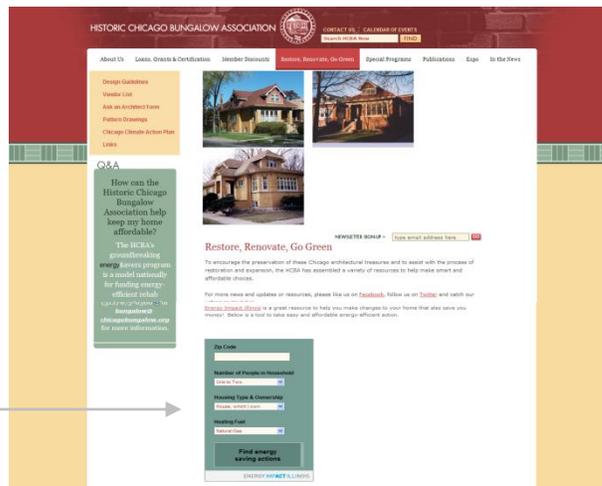
Number of People in Household

Housing Type & Ownership

Heating Fuel

Find energy saving actions

ENERGY IMPACT ILLINOIS



2. Newsletter Content. Our news center contains easy material from which to copy and paste information about Energy Impact Illinois offerings. Soon it will include a newsletter-style article. <http://energyimpactillinois.org/media-center/>
3. Tell us about your programs. We're interested in ways to share information for Illinois businesses and residents. <http://energyimpactillinois.org>

In The News & Gaining Traction

Energy Impact Illinois has initiated outreach efforts. You may have already seen our advertising campaign featuring two main characters – Big Bill and Little Bill – on Metra lines, at commuter stations, on TV, radio or in print. Our most recent news release is below, followed by a few articles of interest.

Energy Impact Illinois Announces Interactive Tools and Financing for Homeowners to Make Energy Efficient Upgrades

Resources aim to give consumers the information they need to make decisions towards reducing energy consumption and lowering energy bills

CHICAGO – November 1, 2011 – Energy Impact Illinois today launched a personalized energy calculator and financial resources for Chicago area homeowners to help them make energy efficient improvements to their homes. The tools, now located at TheEnergyBills.org, will educate homeowners on their current energy usage, provide information on how to make smart energy efficiency investments and connect them with financial resources to make those investments a reality.

“Everyone knows that they will save money and energy if they retrofit their home or business, it is just hard to figure out how to make it happen,” said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), the lead agency behind Energy Impact Illinois. “Energy Impact Illinois simplifies the process with these new resources, which will help people get informed on their energy usage habits and learn ways to make smart energy efficient investments that fit within their budget.”

The energy calculator, known as “MyHomeEQ,” is a unique customized web tool that gives users real, up-to-date information on their home energy usage. The tool is a simple process that tells a user how they use energy, what can be done to lower utility bills while improving energy efficiency, and how to connect with the right resources and contractors needed to implement those actions.

MyHomeEQ integrates actual data from county assessors’ offices and utility bills while incorporating a home’s characteristics submitted by the user to develop an individual energy performance score. Users can then compare that score to similar homes in their area and explore steps that can improve their score, such as sealing air leaks or replacing outdated appliances with new energy efficient models.

“With winter approaching, people are more conscious of their energy costs,” said Blankenhorn. “Our tools and resources will help customers understand how they use energy and how they can navigate the retrofit process, reduce expenses and make their home more comfortable.”

In addition to MyHomeEQ, TheEnergyBills.org also features the Energy Impact Illinois Residential Loan Program, which includes financial resources from local credit unions and banks that can help homeowners make energy efficiency upgrades to their properties in affordable ways. Homeowners can take advantage of unsecured loan products at

competitive rates to help finance energy efficiency improvement projects, with links to qualified contractors to do the work.

To learn more and to take advantage of MyHomeEQ and the Energy Impact Illinois Residential Loan program, and other potential energy efficiency resources, visit TheEnergyBills.org.

About Energy Impact Illinois

Energy Impact Illinois is an alliance of local and federal organizations, utility companies and not-for-profit groups who are dedicated to helping communities change their energy usage habits, by offering access to a broad array of programs and solutions. The alliance provides people and businesses with smart, simple resources that make it easy to save energy and money for collective results. The alliance was formed as a result of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant through the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings Neighborhood Program to spur energy efficiency upgrades and create a long-term energy efficiency market in the region. For more information, visit: www.energyimpactillinois.org.

About BetterBuildings

BetterBuildings is a national program supported by the U.S. Department of Energy that is working to transform the marketplace for energy efficiency upgrades in homes, businesses, and institutions. BetterBuildings has provided seed funding to more than 40 energy efficiency programs across the country that are helping consumers and businesses reduce their energy use, save money, and support the development of local jobs. Learn more about BetterBuildings at www.betterbuildings.energy.gov.

Chicago Tribune

New energy calculator aims to empower homeowners November 13, 2011 | Mary Ellen Podmolik | The Home Front

It was by design that a public-private partnership called Energy Impact Illinois waited until the fall to introduce a new energy calculator called MyHomeEQ.

There's nothing like hearing the heat click on and the wind rustle through leaky windows to get a homeowner thinking about [energy costs](#).

The goal of Energy Impact Illinois, an alliance of utility companies, government agencies and advocacy groups, is to get anyone who pays a utility bill to not only think about energy use but also to find ways to decrease it. The residential portion of the program helps Chicago-area owners of single-family houses and town homes pinpoint areas for improvement; find qualified, vetted contractors; and offer financial assistance for projects that will boost home energy efficiency.

Though there are some bugs to be fixed, here's how it is supposed to work: Type a home address into MyHomeEQ, a personalized energy calculator at theenergybills.org or energyimpactillinois.org. Using data from county assessors' offices and general information about the home and its utility use, the calculator determines estimated annual natural gas and electrical costs. The more data consumers put in, the more specific are the energy costs calculated and the potential savings from projects large and small that can be undertaken to improve home efficiency.

Currently, consumers can input their ComEd account number for the calculator to use actual readings instead of estimates. Major natural gas companies also have pledged to participate in personalizing the data in the future. Alternative companies may be included as well, as their customer base grows.

Consumers who want to pursue some of the projects suggested can then see a database of certified contractors that have asked to be in the program and have passed background checks and inspections by the alliance. The alliance also will perform random on-site inspections of work the companies do in the program. So far, 67 contractors are included.

"It's a balancing act between providing information for customers and saying we are backing them," said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, the lead planning agency behind Energy Impact Illinois. "We're saying they're credible."

None of the information consumers put into MyHomeEQ goes back to the utility companies or is sold to third parties, including the contractors, Blankenhorn added.

The third and final part of the program is financing, and, so far, Energy Impact Illinois is working with two credit unions and a bank to offer loans at below-market interest rates to offset the cost of major projects. To encourage financial institutions to lend, the coalition has a \$2 million loan-loss reserve to guarantee a portion of the unsecured loans a consumer may need to, say, install a new furnace. However, it is the lenders, not the coalition, that underwrite the loans, and they use their own lending criteria.

"Banks and financial institutions aren't used to making these loans," Blankenhorn said. "We think they're safe. We're trying to prove to the financial institutions that this is a market worth investing in."

One of the early financial partners is GreenChoice Bank, which acknowledged it would be difficult to offer loans like these on a broader scale without the loan-loss reserve.

Jon Levey, the bank's chief lending officer, anticipates that most of the loans will be for less than \$10,000 and will be used for furnaces. Loans of more than \$10,000 will need to be secured, with homeowners typically using their home as collateral. The loans will be held in the bank's portfolio.

"This is in direct alignment with our mission: to help people make smart, energy-efficient choices for their homes," said. "This is a well-needed and well-meaning program. We live in a community that has an aged housing stock, and this helps to answer that." Energy Impact Illinois, which is funded by a \$25 million federal Energy Department grant, also includes programs for multifamily residential buildings and commercial and industrial buildings.

Other companies also think consumers increasingly have home energy conservation on their minds. Last week, Best Buy opened a home energy department at its store in Chicago's Bucktown neighborhood, one of three stores picked nationally to test the sale of home energy products and services.



Going Green Made Easier November 16, 2011 | Dennis Rodkin | Deal Estate

In 2008, Laura Reedy Stukel set out to do an environmentally sensitive rehab of her Elmhurst home. "I spent two hours a night for months researching windows and whatever," she recalls. "It was impossibly complicated."

Three years later, planning an energy-saving retrofit of an existing home is vastly simpler thanks to a new program that pulls together data on installation costs, savings on utility bills, potential tax breaks, and expert contractors. "This is what I needed then," Stukel says of the MyHomeEQ program from Energy Impact Illinois. "Most people who want to cut their energy bills don't want to get lost in research." (A real-estate agent, Stukel hatched a small-scale version of the program in 2009.)

The program is both for buyers and for people who are staying in their homes. The goal over the next 20 months is to have 6,000 Chicago- and Rockford-area homeowners make improvements that cut their energy use by 15 percent or more, says Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, a key partner in Energy Impact Illinois. "Changing [to energy-saving] light bulbs is a good thing," he says, "but we want to make a real difference in people's bills, with major activities like new windows or new furnaces."

Type in a home's address at MyHomeEQ, and up pops a profile of its annual energy spending and a menu of home improvements that would cut its energy use; there's also information about the cost of those improvements and how much they would cut energy bills annually. The site also lists qualified contractors who handle, for instance, home air-sealing improvements (which plug minute gaps around windows and doors to keep heated or cooled air from leaking).

Perhaps the most important part of the site is the financing page, where there are details on available rebates, incentives, and loans. This expedites balancing the upfront costs of energy-saving upgrades against long-term financial savings. "Homeowners understand that energy efficiency will save them money," Blankenhorn says, "but they need help making it happen. If you put a new furnace on your 21 percent credit card, that defeats the goal."

The site directs users to participating lenders that offer low-interest loans. Banks and credit unions have committed to making \$125 million in loans to Illinois homeowners through Energy Impact Illinois, Blankenhorn says. The organization has funding from the U.S. Department of Energy as a reserve against the lenders' losses. "This is all new for the institutions," Blankenhorn says, "so we're trying to [nurture] the market with these loan-loss reserves. [But] you're talking about people who are willing to invest in their homes. They're usually a pretty good risk."

Stukel's research indicates that for a typical Elmhurst home, an investment of \$3,000 to \$4,000 in green retrofits pays off with about \$520 in reduced annual energy costs. That's about a six- to eight-year payback period. (The MyHomeEQ calculator suggested improvements on my home would pay off in 11 years.) "In this post-foreclosure mentality where we're going to stay in our homes longer," Stukel notes, "that's not too long to wait for the savings to really kick in."