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$25M boost for business, home energy efficiency

April 22, 2010

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A $25 million federal stimulus grant -- announced this week to coincide with the 40th anniversary of Earth Day -- is expected to make it easier and cheaper for businesses and homeowners in the city and collar counties to make their buildings more energy efficient.

The local award was one of 25 funded nationally by the U.S. Department of Energy as part of the "Retrofit Ramp-up" initiative.

WHAT IS EARTH DAY?Earth Day, now in its 40th year, is an annual celebration of the environment. Gaylord Nelson, a U.S. senator and conservationist from Wisconsin, is credited with founding Earth Day in 1970. Nelson, using anti-war protest methods, organized a "teach-in" to create awareness about the environment. About 20 million people nationwide participated in the teach-in during the spring of 1970. The event has since evolved into a global appreciation of the planet and its finite resources.

"This investment in some of the most innovative energy-efficiency projects across the country will not only help homeowners and businesses make cost-cutting retrofit improvements, but also create jobs right here in America," Vice President Joe Biden said Wednesday.

Part of the local grant will be used to create a "one-stop shop" -- likely online -- to connect customers with businesses that provide such things as energy-efficient windows, insulation and heating systems, said Randy Blankenhorn, executive director of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, which partnered with Chicago and Rockford in seeking the grant.

Blankenhorn said the grant also would be used to provide incentives for financial institutions to offer loans to make homes and businesses more energy efficient.

Blankenhorn said he hopes the program will be in place sometime this summer. It is hoped the federal grant will generate about $500 million in private, local investment, about 2,000 jobs and result in about 9,500 building retrofits.

To get updates on the program, go to *cmap.illinois.gov*.

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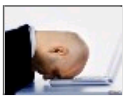
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