

Greener Pastures, Bluer Skies: Electric companies offer 'green' alternatives

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first day in a seven-part series that looks at how students, teachers, families and businesses, even a local city, are leading the charge for a more environmentally-conscious society. To see all the stories and videos from this series, click [here](#).

For as little as \$5 a month, you could help save the planet.

As more and more companies start to think "green," two local electricity providers are offering programs to help reduce carbon emissions commonly released from burning coal.

Kentucky Utilities and Louisville Gas and Electric, along with Inter-County Energy, offer Green Energy programs. The programs allow customers to choose how much energy they get from a renewable resource.

In the case of Inter-County Energy, the source comes from landfills around Kentucky.

"There is a small generation of methane gas at landfills," said Sheree Gilliam, vice president of customer service. "We harness it and use that to make energy. We've had this program for about 10 years."

Gilliam said the customer can choose the number of kilowatt or "envirowatt" hours he or she wants to come from renewable energy.

Energy efficiency programs

Inter-County Energy also offers several energy efficiency programs to help customers deal with [saving energy](#) and the environment. The Touchstone energy home program helps customers with extra insulation, glass and ventilation. There is a home "tune-up" program that helps equip older homes with the latest energy-saving technology. The energy audit program helps homeowners identify how their homes are losing conditioned air outside.

The amount of energy going to the Kentucky power grid depends on how much customers [invest](#) in KU and LG&E's program. The prices are dictated by blocks of kilowatt hours.

For \$5, KU or LG&E will [credit](#) the Kentucky power grid with 300 kilowatt hours from renewable electric sources.

"At whatever level you choose to participate, we ensure that for every kilowatt hour of green energy you purchase, the equivalent amount of renewable energy is being delivered onto your Kentucky electric grid in the place of a kilowatt hour of carbon-based electricity," KU states. "It is important to note that this Green Energy program is primarily being sourced from new renewable energy in Kentucky."

The money collected through KU and LG&E will go to expand the Mother Ann Lee hydroelectric plant, allowing more electric output from the facility.

The Mother Ann Lee hydroelectric plant near Harrodsburg was renovated in 2006 after being purchased by Lock 7 Hydro Partners in 2005, according to the KU Web site.

The 80-year-old plant was brought back into service by "making a retired hydro plant useful again as a source of Kentucky renewable energy," the Web site said.

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Tips on conserving energy use

The U.S. Department of Energy offers these easy low-cost and no-cost ways to save energy:

- * Set your thermostat comfortably low in the winter and comfortably high in the summer.
- * Use compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- * Air dry dishes instead of using your dishwasher's drying cycle.
- * Turn off your computer and monitor when not in use.
- * Plug home electronics, such as TVs and DVD players, into power strips; turn the power strips off when the equipment is not in use (TVs and DVDs in standby mode still use several watts of power).
- * Lower the thermostat on your hot water heater to 120 F.
- * Take short showers instead of baths.
- * Wash only full loads of dishes and clothes.
- * Drive sensibly. Aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration and braking) wastes gasoline.
- * Look for the Energy Star label on home appliances and products.

Energy auditing tips

- * Check the insulation levels in your attic, exterior and basement walls, ceilings, floors and crawl spaces.
- * Check for holes or cracks around your walls, ceilings, windows, doors, light and plumbing fixtures, switches and electrical outlets that can leak air into or out of your home.
- * Check for open fireplace dampers.
- * Make sure your appliances and heating and cooling systems are properly maintained.
- * Look for ways to use lighting controls - like occupancy sensors, dimmers or timers - to reduce lighting energy use, and replace standard light bulbs and fixtures with compact or standard fluorescent lamps.

Driving tips

- * Idling gets you 0 miles per gallon. The best way to warm up a vehicle is to drive it. No more than 30 seconds of idling on winter days is needed.
- * Aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration, and hard braking) wastes gas. It can lower your highway gas mileage 33 percent and city mileage 5 percent.
- * Avoid high speeds. Above 60 miles per hour, gas mileage drops rapidly.
- * When you use overdrive gearing, your car's engine speed goes down. This saves gas and reduces wear.
- * Using cruise control on the highway helps you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, will save gas.
- * Use air conditioning only when necessary.
- * Clear out your car; extra weight decreases gas mileage.
- * Reduce drag by placing items inside the car or trunk rather than on roof racks. A loaded roof rack can decrease your fuel economy by 5 percent.
- * Check into telecommuting, carpooling and public transit to cut mileage and car maintenance costs.

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