

Word count: 662

Power Down to Beat the Heat

Submitted by Sustainable Belmont

Summer is here, and the perfect energy storm is brewing. Summer is the peak season for electricity usage in New England due to the increased use of air conditioning in homes. No major new power plants have been built in New England during the last five years, and very few are planned for the near future. And the growing demand for electricity in the summer puts an increasing strain on the power grid during the hottest days. The result? If customers don't reduce use of electricity, brownouts and blackouts could become a regular occurrence each summer.

Power grid operators have imposed new charges on electric utility companies to encourage them to conserve electricity during peak periods (typically between 1:00 and 4:00 pm, when temperatures and humidity are at their highest). These charges will be passed on to you in the form of higher electric bills. Because Belmont is served by its own town-owned utility, the Belmont Municipal Light Department (BMLD), these charges won't begin until 2008.

However, the charges to the BMLD will be based on the amount of electricity that the town uses during the *single hour* in which New England consumes the largest amount of electricity in 2007. If we collectively reduce our use of electricity during that one hour, we can reduce the town's (and our own) cost of electricity for an *entire year* in 2008. These savings could be significant: If each of the town's 10,000 households turned off just one 100-watt light during the peak hour, the savings to the town would be more than \$40,000. The more we reduce our demand, the greater the savings.

How can you help reduce Belmont's summer peak energy use?

1. If you have central air conditioning, install a programmable thermostat and set it at 78 degrees for the hours you're typically home and 85 degrees for the rest of the time. You can reduce energy consumption about one to three percent for each degree the thermostat is set above 72 degrees.
2. To have a cool home when you return from work or a trip, program your thermostat to turn on the air conditioner 30 minutes before your arrival. Window air conditioners can be plugged into timers.
3. Reduce the need for air conditioning by pulling down window shades, closing off rooms that don't need to be cooled, and using fans to draw cool air in at night and circulate cool air during the day.
4. Before leaving home, turn off all lights and unplug appliances that draw electricity even when turned off, such as computers, chargers/adapters, DVD players, and televisions. Many appliances give off heat as they consume electricity, which raises indoor temperatures and makes your cooling system work harder.

The BMLD is also extending an energy hand: It is offering a \$75 rebate to any customer who purchases a new Energy Star-rated window air conditioner in June 2007. What's more, you will receive a credit for the \$20 fee charged by the Department of Public Works for removing and disposing of your less-efficient older air conditioner. Rebate forms are available at the BMLD office at 40 Prince Street or online (PDF) at **www.town.belmont.ma.us/electric**. For more information, call (617) 993-2800.

Between the money saved from using an energy-efficient air conditioner and the rebate from the BMLD, your new unit can pay for itself in just two years.

The benefits of energy conservation during hot weather extend far beyond your wallet. Reducing energy use during peak hours helps improve air quality, because that is when the dirtiest, least efficient power plants are running. In addition, it lowers emissions of the heat-trapping gases that drive climate change.

So when the summer gets sweltering, stay cool while saving energy. You'll save money, help your neighbors and the town save on next year's energy costs, *and* help the environment.

For more information or to receive Sustainable Belmont's monthly e-news bulletin, email sustainablebelmont@gmail.com.