



# A CALL TO URGENCY

## Energy efficiency needs a lot more attention

By Rick Phelps

“A sense of urgency” is one of those common phrases that you tend to hear every time you start a new job. Whatever you are working on is the most important thing in the immediate world and you MUST proceed with urgency. Unfortunately, our government regulators didn’t get the “urgency memo” and progress to an energy efficient world moves at its own petty pace. In this column, I’ll share a couple of recent regulatory tales, mourn the lost opportunities, renew my call for an energy efficient culture, and close with a good buzzard story — the buzzard story alone should keep you reading.

Nearly two years ago we started talking with the Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) about expanding our successful Community Energy Partnership with Southern California Edison (SCE) and the Town of Mammoth Lakes to include all of the areas served by SCE in Bishop and Inyo and Mono counties — the Eastern Sierra Energy Initiative (ESEI). This idea was received enthusiastically by the ESCOG and SCE and we started preparing plans and budgets in March of 2008 with a target of kicking off the new partnership in January 2009. We also sought and obtained supporting resolutions from Inyo and Mono counties, the City of Bishop, and the Town of Mammoth Lakes ... and then the fun began.

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) got involved and began to assess the energy efficiency plans of the state’s investor owned utilities (such as SCE and Pacific Gas & Electric). Assess they did and more budgets and plans were prepared and submitted. We reported back to our local governments and I began to sound more like the Music Man than the mild-mannered energy guy that I am. I had no news to report, but had to dance and keep saying that approval was coming — just over the horizon. Everybody was very understanding and patient, but as we continued planning, nothing happened. Finally, on Aug. 25, the



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CPUC issued a “DRAFT” decision on energy efficiency. If all goes well, ESEI will start Jan. 1, 2010 — a year late. I guess our regulators didn’t get the urgency speech in their job orientation.

Another good example of lack of urgency is the so-called Stimulus Bill — officially the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This was adopted in February with much fanfare about how energy efficiency and renewables would be part of the investment. The energy funds for small cities and counties (which includes all of us in the Eastern Sierra) will be distributed by the California Energy Commission (CEC). Following a seemingly unending series of public workshops and webcasts, the application packages should be out in the next couple of weeks. What we will get for cost effective energy projects in the Eastern Sierra is:

|                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Inyo County    | \$79,940.48 |
| City of Bishop | \$25,000.00 |
| Mono County    | \$50,000.00 |
| Mammoth Lakes  | \$41,645.15 |

The CEC should be saluted for their thoroughness. Their attention to detail will ensure that the money is spent wisely, although the actual shovels probably won’t turn any dirt until sometime in 2010. However, finding energy projects to conform to the dollars and cents awards level will be challenging. This sort of makes you wonder if the CEC had stuck to round numbers and left out the cents, would we be turning shovels sooner?

Now we can talk about the riddle of lost opportunities. Lost opportunities in utility-regulatory speak are simply those energy

efficiency savings that we could have captured in 2009 that we now have to wait until 2010 to harvest. We can never get 2009 back, and if you extend this lost opportunity thought to the state of California, we have left a lot of kilowatt-hours and dollars on the table.

In previous columns, we’ve talked about the importance of creating a culture of energy efficiency in the Eastern Sierra. Recognizing that saving energy is not just technology, the energy efficiency culture makes people think about how energy is used every day of our lives. The challenge of creating this culture is that we have to have an effective marketing, education and outreach plan for energy users in the Eastern Sierra. We’ve done that in Mammoth Lakes and plan to expand those efforts with the ESEI. Yet, the CPUC


in their draft energy efficiency decision cut the marketing, education, and outreach funding by 34 percent. I guess we will just have to move a little slower with that energy efficiency culture. However, since urgency doesn’t seem to be an issue that shouldn’t be a problem.

Now for the buzzard story: Two buzzards were sitting on a high tree branch and staring at the desolate acres below. One says to the other: “Enough of this planning, let’s kill something.”

The joke, unfortunately, also works with energy efficiency.

*Rick Phelps is Executive Director of the High Sierra Energy Foundation. The views expressed in this column are those of the author and not necessarily those of his employer.*

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