

THE MINING Journal

Energy assessments

SWP offers home reviews to conserve energy, lower bills



A member of the Superior Watershed Partnership's Energy Conservation Crew replaces an incandescent bulb with an LED bulb during a home energy assessment. (Photo courtesy of Superior Watershed Partnership)

MARQUETTE — Upper Peninsula winters are known nationwide for their duration, snowfall and intense cold.

Those who live in the area also know a U.P. winter can mean soaring heat and electric bills as residents work to keep the chill out of their homes. These bills can be challenging for many households, as they can be large and sometimes unpredictable throughout the winter.

To help address the issue of high energy usage and costs, the Superior Watershed Partnership has been offering home energy assessments to income-qualified Upper Peninsula residents in conjunction with the Michigan Energy Assistance Program, Upper Peninsula Power Co. and Semco Energy Gas Co.

“This is the second year we’re going into with the Energy Conservation Corp. Last year they did about 250 home energy assessments all across the U.P. and this year we have about 500,” said Emily Leach, program manager at the Superior Watershed Partnership, noting the corps can conduct the assessments for qualified U.P. households throughout the year.

The home energy assessments cover a wide range of energy efficiency and weatherization strategies for homeowners and renters alike, aiming to help reduce bills and energy usage, she said.



All crewman stands with homeowners in front of solar panels installed by the crew. (Photo courtesy of Superior Watershed Partnership)

Energy conservation crews start the assessments by talking with households and finding out areas of concern, such as drafty areas or appliances that may not be working efficiently, Leach said. Then, the crew does a walkthrough of the home to identify further areas that could be targeted for efficiency improvements.

After the walkthrough, the crews install a variety of energy efficiency equipment in the home, depending on the needs of the household and results of the assessment, she said.

“We’ll do basic measures, change out to LED lighting, caulk around windows, doors or any draft sealants that need to be done, we’ll use spray foam, insulation where there’s visibly an air leak coming through, and put in door sweeps, (and) pipe wrap insulation,” she said.

They’ll also help households with general cleaning and maintenance of appliances, such as cleaning coils beneath refrigerators and replacing furnace filters on a monthly basis, she said.

In addition to this, the crews provide households with education and resources regarding energy conservation, as they speak with clients about their energy usage habits and how they can alter them to reduce household energy consumption.

Overall, these measures can help households save money on their bills, be more comfortable in the winter, and conserve energy usage, Leach said.

For those who are interested in receiving a home energy assessment, Leach said there are different income requirements for home energy assessments through the various funding sources, as those who apply for the MEAP program need to make 150 percent of the federal poverty level or less, while those who apply for the assessments funded by UPPCO or Semco can make up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Renters are eligible for the MEAP assistance and non-MEAP home energy assessments, but must have signed approval from their landlord for the assessments and weatherization upgrades, she said.

Leach advised those who are interested in the program to call the office for guidance on what program your household may be qualified to receive.

“We encourage people to reach out, even just to see if they fit within the requirements, we can help them out if they have a ballpark for their monthly earnings in their household,” she said.

Interested parties are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, as energy assessments will be conducted throughout the winter, and can visit the SWP’s Energy Office at Lakeview Arena in Marquette, call the office at 906-273-2742 or visit www.superiorwatersheds.org/energy-conservation for more information.

Leach also encourages those who are looking to lower their bills and conserve energy to find resources and incentives to do so by calling 211 or contacting local agencies such as St. Vincent de Paul.
