I-937 Report Shows Northwest Utilities Meeting or Exceeding Goals

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Washington’s 17 largest electric utilities blew past the initial energy efficiency goals of the state’s voter-approved clean energy law and are on-track to meet its renewables standard with clean power to spare.

“This is a wonderful story,” said NW Energy Coalition executive director Sara Patton. “Initiative 937 has done exactly what Washington voters wanted it to. And our electric utilities -- both private and public – have really stepped up to the plate and delivered.”

Passed in 2006, I-937 says the state’s largest electric utilities should take advantage of all the cost-effective energy efficiency opportunities available, thus reducing their customers’ bills. It also begins a gradual ramp-up of eligible renewable resources in utilities’ energy mix, finishing at 15% in 2020.

The first I-937 check-in covers the biennial 2010-through-2011 period for energy efficiency and utilities’ plans for how they’ll get 3% of their power from eligible renewables from this year forward.Utilities covered by I-937 submitted compliance reports to state regulators in June.

According to those reports:

• Each of Washington’s 17 largest electric utilities met or exceeded its own energy efficiency target.

• Collectively, these utilities achieved 229 average megawatts of energy efficiency in 2010-11 – enough to power all the homes in Spokane and Tacoma combined.

• To reach 3% eligible renewables, the utilities intent to invest primarily in wind power projects and to wring considerably more hydropower out of existing dams.In fact, upgrades at existing hydro facilities are projected to meet 22% of the renewables target.

• Many utilities “bought ahead,” acquiring additional renewable resources in preparation for the 9% standard taking effect in 2016.Northwest Energy Efficiency Council executive director Stan Price noted the dramatic rise in utilities’ efficiency achievements since passage of I-937. “We’ve endured decades of rollercoaster energy efficiency investment and achievement,” said Price, whose organization was a prime initiative sponsor in 2006. “Requiring the state’s large utilities to capture all cost-effective savings provides needed certainty to the energy efficiency industry and to customers.”The 229 average megawatts of energy efficiency achieved in 2010-11 is nearly 2½ times the 94 average megawatts of savings the 17 qualifying utilities achieved in 2004-5 biennium. It’s also a third more than those utilities figured they would get.

“That just shows we’ve got a deep well of savings opportunities,” Price said. “We’re in no danger of running dry.”Utilities plan to meet the renewables standard with a wide range of resources, including wind, solar, biomass and landfill gas. It’s noteworthy that utility upgrades at existing renewable-generation facilities – hydropower dams – are projected to cover nearly a quarter of the statewide requirement.

“We are building on Washington’s clean energy heritage,” said Renewable

Northwest Project executive director Rachel Shimshak. “Clean, low-cost hydropower laid the foundation of Northwest prosperity. Creating tomorrow’s clean energy economy will restore both our leadership and our financial well-being.”I-937’s renewable energy standard has convinced developers to keep investing in Washington state. Over the past 10 years, new renewable investments in the state total more than $8 billion. That’s meant creation of more than 5,000 construction and 2,200 permanent jobs, $85 million of new revenue to cover local government services and ongoing lease payments of thousands of dollars a year per turbine for property owners
hosting wind farms.
“Washington businesses and families are benefitting from I-937’s efficiency and renewables standards,” Patton concluded. “And this is just the beginning!”
Policy experts from the NW Energy Coalition and the Renewable Northwest Project analyzed the data utilities submitted to state and regional authorities.

For more information:

• Go here for a general overview of I-937’s success – www.nwenergy.org/data/937_success_9-2012.pdf

• Go here to see the energy efficiency and renewable energy achievements made by each of the 17 qualifying utilities - www.nwenergy.org/data/937-insert.pdf