

Black Hills Power, Inc. d/b/a Black Hills Energy

Customer Outreach

Narrative of Outreach and Community Events
Conducted during Plan Year 2019

Black Hills Power, Inc. d/b/a Black Hills Energy (BHE) has been implementing an outreach strategy that was developed for a three-year program period. The program year was from September 1, 2019 and concluded August 31, 2020 (PY2019). The Energy Efficiency Solutions (EES) plan includes methods that are easy to implement to improve energy efficiency in the businesses or homes of BHE commercial and residential customers.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of many businesses, organizations, public events, & social gatherings, many of the marketing strategies had to be changed to address the health concerns and safety of all involved. BHE continues to put the safety as our top priority during the pandemic.

Marketing & Advertising

Marketing and advertising are an integral way in which BHE relays the EES program information that is available for both residential and commercial customers. Through BHE's website, bill inserts, billboards, community sponsorships and program handouts customers can learn more about the prescriptive commercial and residential program as well as the custom commercial program. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our marketing and advertising efforts became an integral part of keeping contact with our customers. Without being able to be present at community events and home shows, our online/digital marketing became crucial in updating our customers of our rebate programs. With the discontinuation of the SD energy efficiency rebate program, our connection with our customers via digital marketing kept our residential and commercial customers updated on the programs available and when they would need to submit their applications. As our program ended, we saw a large increase in applications from both residential and commercial customers.

The Black Hills website has been updated to a more user-friendly experience than in previous years. The customer can go directly to *energy-ready.com* to review rebate opportunities and energy efficiency strategies for their home and business. On the website are the program applications which include clear and concise details about the supporting documentation that is required with the submission of their application.

Bill inserts have been an effective way to promote the different rebate programs, especially during the pandemic. Five bill inserts were included in customer bills for the program year 2019, which was from September 1, 2019 – August 31, 2020. Each month, the bill insert was a quarter page flyer (Figure 1.) promoting one of the rebate programs.



Figure 1. Bill Insert



The large flex wrap billboard is installed on Deadwood Avenue, which is a main street in Rapid City. With this street being very high traffic, this updated billboard has been a beneficial advertising tool for the residential EES program.

The marketing materials that were developed during PY2019 by the Corporate Communications department at BHE have proven to be a very successful method of sharing both residential and commercial rebate program details before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The customer response to the marketing and advertising completed during PY2019 was very positive and helped keep our customers updated during the pandemic. Customer calls inquiring about the information in their bill inserts for all the rebate programs was extremely successful. The return on investment for the bill inserts is very valuable.

Community Outreach

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 pandemic all the home shows BHE had planned on attending were cancelled due to health concerns. Many

COMMUNITY EVENT BOOTHS

Community events are a great way to promote Energy Efficiency programs with a booth. EES program folders are handed out to customers and BHE personnel can discuss with the customers the rebates available, the application process, and any additional information the customers inquire about. Again, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many events that BHE typically attends were canceled due to health concerns. Below are listed the two community events where the BHE Energy Efficiency department had a booth prior to COVID-19:

1. SD CEO Women's Conference
2. SD Electro-Tech Conference

COMMUNITY NETWORKING EVENTS

One of the best ways to reach BHE customers on a more personal level has been to attend networking events through area Chamber of Commerce mixers and other community networking groups. These regular events allow the Energy Efficiency Program Coordinator to build relationships within the community, present the EES programs to the group, and discuss potential rebate opportunities for commercial and residential projects. These outreach efforts were limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic and many of these events were canceled. A list of community networking groups within the Black Hills area which the EE program coordinator was able to attend before and continue to attend virtually during the quarantine are listed below:

- Black Hills Home Builders Association
- Black Hills REALTORS
- Rapid City Chamber of Commerce
- Rapid City Chamber Ambassador Group
- Spearfish Chamber of Commerce
- Rotary International



COMMUNITY IMPACT

Black Hills Energy is invested in the communities we serve, live, and work. BHE believes that a comprehensive outreach strategy is important in order to meet the overall needs of the community. BHE has continued to be involved in community relations activities in the Black Hills Power service territory. In 2019, BHE invested over \$1 million in the great work of dozens of worthy local organizations and nonprofits. Over 190 South Dakota employees shared their “energy” and volunteered to nearly 270 community organizations.



Figure 2. Community Giving

This has resulted in a direct economic impact of \$172 million in South Dakota through franchise fees, contributions, compensation to 790 South Dakota employees, payments to suppliers and property, and sales and uses taxes.

Education Outreach

SCHOOL-BASED EDUCATION

The Living Wise school-based energy efficiency program was presented to fifth-grade students at area elementary schools. Teachers were provided a curriculum kit to guide the program. Each student was given a kit, as shown in Figure 3, to take home that contained easy-to-use energy efficient supplies which could be installed in their home, with permission and assistance from their parents or guardian. Each kit contained a nine (9) watt LED bulb, high efficiency showerhead, kitchen faucet aerator, LED night light, filter-tone alarm, digital thermometer, 5 second flow-test bag, and a toilet leak tab. Also included in the kit was an interactive card detailing water and natural resource facts.



Figure 3. Energy Efficiency Kit

The program’s goal was to offer energy efficiency education to fifth-grade students in the school district within Black Hills Power’s service territory. 88% of program participants responded that they did work with their family on this program. One teacher from Hot Springs Elementary School stated, “The program is well laid out and easy to follow.” The overall participation for the Living Wise program was 35 teachers in SD with

1,000 students, and 1 teacher in Weston County, WY with 19 students. The total participation per city is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Total Number of Participants for the Living Wise Program

City	Teachers	Students
Belle Fourche, SD	1	113
Black Hawk, SD	3	65
Box Elder, SD	10	250
Hill City, SD	1	31
Hot Springs, SD	3	68
Lead-Deadwood, SD	1	60
Rapid City, SD	18	293
Spearfish, SD	1	9
Summerset, SD	4	111
Total	42	1,000

ELECTRO-TECHNOLOGY EXPO

Black Hills Energy has organized and sponsored the Electro-Technology Expo since 2000. The expo was held January 16, 2020 in Rapid City, SD. The Expo is designed to bring together energy experts to share their electronic technologies, applications, products and services. This event draws professionals from the building industry, commercial, industrial and trade allies.

Twenty-five class sessions were held during the 2020 expo and offered code and non-code hours for electricians through the state electrical commissions in South Dakota and Wyoming. There were also Continuing Education Credits for attendees through the City of Rapid City Mechanical Board. There was a class session offered discussing the EES programs available through Black Hills Energy.

Over 375 participated in the Electro-Technology Expo and seventeen vendor booths. The key-note speakers were Jared McEntaffer, PhD – Regional Economist with the Black Hills Knowledge Network & Tom Johnson, CEO of Elevate Rapid City. The main content of the presentation discussed the local economy and the opportunities that the local contractors have when it comes to electric products and services.

Historically the Expo has drawn mostly electricians but during the planning committee for the 2020 Expo their focus was to draw in mechanical engineers and architects as well. This was accomplished by offering a greater variety of class sessions that appealed to a broader audience related to these industries.

COMMERCIAL ENERGY EFFICIENCY REBATE PROGRAM TRAINING

Educating electricians, contractors, builders, and dealers on how to submit the EES program applications has been a focus for PY2019. By developing comprehensive EES program folders and providing clear information on the BHE website, industry professionals can submit more projects for potential commercial rebates.



Given the hurdles that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented, BHE has continued to work with trade allies to continue to offer training and updates on our rebate programs. Although not in person, we were able to connect via email and online meetings/calls to our network of contractors, vendors, employees, and customers. Utilizing

Conclusion

Educational outreach to our residential customers will continue to be our focus going forward. Given the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced almost every part of our world, we continue to strive to make sure safety is our top priority for our customers, employees, and everyone we work with. Communication through many channels was the focus in PY2019 and will continue into 2021.