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Group urges less natural gas use Better efficiency offers myriad benefits, report says

**By Todd Neff, Boulder Daily Camera Staff Writer
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Natural-gas exploration in environmentally sensitive areas of Colorado and the Mountain West should take a back seat to reducing gas consumption, says a new report by a Boulder environmental organization.

Western Resource Advocates' new report, "Using Natural Gas More Efficiently: Saving Money and Protecting our Western Way of Life," was released last week. The authors estimate that energy efficiency built into homes, businesses, industry and power generation could save trillions of cubic feet of natural gas between now and 2020.

Doing so would save consumers money, reduce dependence on imports and prevent ecological damage inherent in natural-gas exploration, the authors say.

The United States burns about 22 trillion cubic feet of natural gas annually. The report estimates that conservation could cut residential natural-gas usage by 25 percent, with reductions of up to 11 percent in businesses and industry.

Energy-efficiency measures ranging from water-heater blankets to recycling hot water in paper mills could save \$11 billion in natural gas costs by 2020, according to the report — more than twice what the measures would cost. It could also ease the pressure to drill for gas in places like Colo-

rado's Roan Plateau in Garfield County, where environmental groups and local governments have fought gas-exploration.

"We can't eliminate natural-gas development in the West, but we can take some of the pressure off so we can make decisions about what gets leased and how it gets developed more thoughtfully," said Jim Martin, executive director of Western Resource Advocates in Boulder.

Natural-gas development involves the construction of access roads and multiple three-acre to four-acre well pads cleared of vegetation. Environmental advocates say such development fragments wildlife habitats and degrades air quality in nearby communities, and can contaminate water.

About 42 million acres of public lands are under lease for natural gas exploration in the Mountain West, an area equal to two-thirds the area of Colorado, the report says.

Some energy conservationists want governments to take the lead in fostering energy efficiency. Howard Geller, executive director of Boulder-based Southwest Energy Efficiency Project, said the market alone isn't enough.

"If you have utilities and state and local agencies educating consumers, training building contractors and providing rebates, people will buy a lot more energy-efficient furnaces and water heaters," Geller said.

Colorado House Bill 1133, which awaits Gov. Bill Owens signature and which Geller helped write, would lead to conservation programs by natural gas utilities, based on guidelines to be created by the Colorado Public Utilities Commission.

Ken Wonstolen, senior vice president and general counsel of the Colorado Oil & Gas Association, said the industry supports conservation. The question is whether government intervention is required to achieve it.

"Two or three years of sustained high prices are going to drive people to more efficient appliances and heating systems and all the rest," Wonstolen said.

Natural-gas prices at the wellhead have doubled in recent years, to about \$6 per 1,000 cubic feet.

Wonstolen said that even with conservation, the need to develop Colorado and Western natural-gas resources would probably not diminish.

"We're going to need all the gas we can develop, plus conservation and renewable energy and probably nuclear energy," Wonstolen said. "We're going to need it all."

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BY THE NUMBERS

Biggest U.S. natural-gas consumers by percentage of gas used.

Industrial: **33**

Residential: **23**

Electric Power: **22**

Commercial: **14**

The United States consumes about 22 million cubic feet of natural gas annually.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration