



The West in Summary

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SWEEPing in Energy Efficiency & Value

The Southwest Energy Efficiency Project (SWEEP) is a small organization with a big goal -- increased energy efficiency. SWEEP is based in Boulder, Colo., and promotes energy efficiency in six states: Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming. California wasn't included because, as a state, it is already so aware of energy efficiency issues.

SWEEP is small: three full-time staff members in Boulder, one representative in Tucson, Ariz., one part-time representative in Santa Fe, NM, and one full-time person in the Denver office who concentrates on combined heat and power issues.

SWEEP thus takes efficiency to heart -- they occasionally interact and collaborate with similar agencies across the country, and work with environmental agencies in their six-state region, so as to have a larger impact than what such a small organization would normally be able to.

SWEEP's Web site says that their main activities fall into six categories: state energy legislation; utility energy efficiency programs; building energy codes; analysis of energy efficiency potential; combined heating, cooling and power; and home retrofit.

According to Mark Ruzzin, program associate at SWEEP, of their six main activities, the ones most focused on are energy legislation and working with utilities, especially on demand-side management (DSM) programs.

Their efforts in the arena of policy and regulatory barriers have seen some notable success recently. Ruzzin noted that while it often takes years to accomplish anything through legislative efforts, seven bills relating to energy

efficiency got adopted by state legislatures in 2005, and five of them were signed into law.

"We're beginning to see some real progress on the state level," said Ruzzin.

Ruzzin said Arizona and New Mexico are the states in which the most progress has been made thus far. The political and regulatory leadership in New Mexico legislature, in particular, were singled out by Ruzzin as being especially helpful in energy efficiency matters.

SWEEP is also starting to see some success in Utah, and even Nevada has started to come around recently. Construction of new homes in Nevada is a huge issue in the energy efficiency arena. Ruzzin noted, "Some of the highest levels of Energy Star homes are in Las Vegas."

An irony Ruzzin brought up is that Colorado, SWEEP's home state, is one of the states in their region most in need of energy efficiency improvements. SWEEP has encountered more barriers in Colorado from the legislative side, particularly from the governor and the Public Utilities Commission, than they have in other states, though they have made some progress with utilities, most notably with Xcel. SWEEP is just starting to develop some relationships in Wyoming, with the main difficulty being that Wyoming is a very resource-laden, lightly-populated state.

Options for continuing energy efficiency improvements include efficient lighting as well as with new appliance standards, where SWEEP saw great success in Nevada and Arizona. Both states both passed new appliance standards, though only Arizona's governor signed them into law.

While SWEEP and similar organizations were less than impressed with many parts of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, Ruzzin did note that since it

did include updated standards for appliances, SWEEP will be able to reduce some efforts in that area and apply them to other things, since those new standards now apply on a national level.

More work is expected by SWEEP on legislative efforts pertaining to natural gas DSM. This is a tough area for natural gas utilities, as they don't make a lot of profit on natural gas, Ruzzin said. Colorado recently had such a bill adopted by their legislature, but it was quashed by the governor there. He thinks they will see some more efforts towards this end though, especially due to recent natural gas price increases.

Another area SWEEP intends to concentrate on is in utility energy efficiency programs. SWEEP asks utilities to spend more money on DSM, and helps them spend that money wisely once they decide to do so. SWEEP wants to raise awareness about energy savings potential, and to be seen as an information resource.

They're also "always looking for opportunities" with regard to new building energy codes, stated Ruzzin.

While SWEEP is looking for those opportunities, others are finding that energy efficient buildings may have an advantage in the marketplace. The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors recently released their Green Value Report, the result of a two-year study on the subject, which states, "while evidence is as yet thin, sufficient evidence exists to say that green buildings do indeed make money. Because comparatively few green buildings have been completed, however, the extent of value benefit is still hard to quantify."

If SWEEP continues its efforts as well as it has been, there's little doubt that quantifying those benefits will be much easier in the future.

- **Timothy McClanahan**