

Nebraska Cultivates Energy Efficiency Savings

Early explorers dubbed Nebraska a “Great Desert” due to its arid environment. Nebraska’s first settlers are credited with transforming the state into an agricultural powerhouse. Under the Homestead Act, the federal government provided land for free; these early pioneers provided the “sweat equity” to cultivate the terrain. Nebraska continues this model of offering its residents a hand-up, rather than a handout, through a partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to deliver the Weatherization Assistance Program (Weatherization). Weatherization reduces energy costs for low-income households by increasing the energy efficiency of their homes, while ensuring their health and safety.

Low-income households typically spend 14% of their total annual income on energy, compared with 3.5% for other households. This burden becomes more unmanageable when energy prices soar. Low-income families often have to cut back on other necessities to pay their energy bills. Even with these difficult conditions, many Nebraskans still hesitate to ask for help. One recipient of weatherization services remarked, “My pride stops me from getting welfare, but a program like yours is great. It has helped us in a lot of different ways...we can stand better on our own now.”

Weatherization measures reduce home energy consumption, which provides a permanent boost to the household’s budget. This helps the household become more self-sufficient. Nebraska has weatherized more than 50,000 homes since the inception of the program.

NEW TECHNOLOGY YIELDS GREATER SAVINGS

Scientific advances in farming and irrigation methods have increased agricultural yields and boosted the state’s economic prosperity. Weatherization has also integrated advanced technologies and techniques to raise energy savings and improve program delivery. The Nebraska Energy Office administers the program and nine local agencies deliver services to every county in the state.

NATIONAL WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM

Homes weatherized in 1999	68,000
DOE allocations in 1999	\$135 million
Average annual energy cost savings per household	\$300
Average space heating savings	25-30%
Energy benefits returned for every \$1 invested	\$2.10
Jobs supported	7,000

NEBRASKA

Homes weatherized in 1999 (with DOE \$)	579
DOE funding in 1999	\$1.1 million
Clients served in 1999	
Elderly	33%
People with disabilities	38%
Families with children	21%

Nebraska crews use computerized energy audits and advanced diagnostic equipment, such as the blower door, to determine the most cost-effective measures appropriate for each home. Crews also test heating units and appliances for carbon monoxide and gas leaks. Typical weatherization services include installing insulation; sealing ducts; tuning and repairing furnaces; and mitigating heat loss through windows, doors, and other infiltration points. Clients are educated on basic energy efficiency practices and on the maintenance of the installed measures.

In 1999, Nebraska weatherized 579 homes with DOE dollars and an additional 508 homes with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Nebraska continues to use innovative approaches to improve weatherization services. The state developed a pilot mortgage loan supplement for low-income homebuyers. This program allows prospective homebuyers to make energy-saving home improvements without raising the cost of the monthly mortgage payment. Nebraska also implements a comprehensive outreach program to inform all low-income residents about weatherization. The state developed brochures with basic information on the weatherization process. Nebraska also uses targeted publications, such as senior citizen newsletters, to reach potential clients.

Homegrown Approach

Nebraska prides itself on the professionalism and courtesy of its workforce. Weatherization crews receive technical training at national conferences, regional training meetings, and in the field. Their approach to customer service, however, is a matter of convention. A recipient of weatherization services stated, "I can tell they not only do this as a job, but they are about saving people money, and being more comfortable... I am so grateful." Another weatherization client remarked on the crews' customer service, "They were very friendly people... If everyone was as helpful as these workers were to me, the world would be a better place." Weatherization crews also serve as an energy efficiency resource to the community.

Bountiful Benefits

Weatherization creates important and immediate economic benefits for low-income Nebraskans. The measures installed also provide a long-term buffer against future energy price increases. One recipient of weatherization services remarked,

"I am sure this will help a lot on my utilities." Many times, clients are equally thankful for the increase in comfort and warmth. Another weatherization recipient noted, "This home is a whole lot warmer than it was before."



Weatherization crew blows cellulose insulation into the attic of a Nebraska home.

Weatherization measures create benefits for the entire community by reducing the export of energy dollars. Keeping money in the

community spurs local economic growth and creates additional jobs.

In addition, reducing residential energy demand decreases electricity generation and avoids emissions of nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, and other pollutants. This improves local air quality and reduces adverse health effects, particularly asthma. Cleaner air helps Nebraska's farmers produce healthier crops.

Weatherization Works!

Weatherization produces an impressive range of benefits for low-income households and communities. Nationally, for every \$1 invested in the program, Weatherization returns \$2.10 in energy-related benefits. Weatherization measures reduce national energy consumption and curb demand for imported oil. Weatherization works for Nebraska and America!



To learn more about the Weatherization Assistance Program, contact:

Weatherization Assistance Program • U.S. Department of Energy, EE-42
1000 Independence Avenue, SW • Washington, DC 20585-0121 • (202) 586-4074

Visit the Weatherization Web site at: www.eren.doe.gov/buildings/weatherization_assistance
or call the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Clearinghouse at: 1-800-DOE-3732



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