

Message for Kentucky: Conserve energy, save money

By Andy Brack

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CHARLESTON, S.C. – There's a simple message Kentucky leaders should hear at the two-day Governor's Conference on the Environment this week:

Stop burning so much coal. How? By conserving energy and exploring alternative forms of energy. Why? Because it will help consumers save money and improve the environment.

Bluegrass state residents have good reasons to be concerned about the amount of electricity they use, 95 percent of which comes from burning coal. Kentucky's homes and businesses rank first in the nation in using more electricity – 73 percent more – than the national average, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. Among the ways Kentucky could cut energy consumption and, in turn, cut harmful greenhouse gases:

- **Adopt energy-efficient appliance standards.** Kentucky could become the first state in the South to adopt standards for businesses to sell appliances that use less electricity. For every dollar in any increased costs for better appliances, consumers save \$4.50 in energy, according to a study by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. In fact, the study says Kentucky can avoid 152 megawatts of peak power production and save \$334 billion by 2030 by adopting such standards. If every state in the South adopted them, Southern states would save as much energy as provided by 10 new power plants.
- **Set renewable energy standards.** Kentucky and other states can encourage development of alternative energy sources and lower reliance on coal by setting

renewable energy standards. Such standards would require power companies to get an increasing share of power from renewable sources. Studies in North Carolina and Florida have shown that combining energy efficiencies with renewable power sources produce savings worth millions and millions of dollars.

- **Establish a Public Benefits Fund.** Such a fund would direct a small portion of every power bill into a fund that would explore and expand energy efficiency programs, develop renewable energy projects, help poorer residents pay power bills and conduct energy research. North Carolina started such a fund in 1980; Wisconsin estimates it saves \$6 for the public for every dollar invested.

These and other ideas are highlighted in a new book by the nonpartisan Center for a Better South unveiled last month at the University of Louisville. Among the findings and recommendations in *Getting Greener: Progressive Environmental Ideas for the American South*:

- **Better air:** Enact a diesel clean-up fund to cut particulate pollution and reap maximum health benefits. Louisville and the Huntington-Ashland area rank among the top places in the country for child health problems from diesel particulate pollution.
- **Better land:** Kentucky spends about a dollar a year per person on public land conservation. If it spent \$1 per month as recommended in the book, it would generate \$50 million a year to conserve and protect Bluegrass residents' heritage with land.

- **Better buildings:** Because 70 percent of energy consumption and 38 percent of greenhouse gas emissions are due to residential and commercial buildings, it makes sense to figure out pragmatic ways to make better buildings. The Center recommends that state and local policymakers require new and retrofitted buildings and schools to be built to green energy standards. Fortunately, the additional costs of building green buildings instead of traditional buildings are only 2 percent to 5 percent higher – which are quickly recouped from energy savings.

To download the *Getting Greener* book or learn more, go online to:

www.gettinggreener.info

Like all Southern states, Kentucky has an enormous potential to create energy policies that save money for consumers and lessen the environmental impact on her people and land. Now is the time to work on them.

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