

Partnering with your local energy efficiency program

BY KARA RODGERS

In a recessionary economy and technologically innovative society, today's consumers are becoming more cost-conscious. By pointing your customers toward energy efficiency, you can help them save money on their utility bills in the long term. Local utility efficiency programs recognize this savings opportunity, and are equipping plumbing contractors with the resources to help their customers find these most energy efficient, cost-saving options.

Many natural gas utility efficiency program administrators are also seeking to improve their relationships with plumbing contractors and plumbing supply houses. Some employ specialized trade or channel managers to work directly with plumbing contractors to provide them with the talking points they need to promote higher efficiency, ENERGY STAR® qualified natural gas water heaters. Both the utility and the plumbing contractor benefit through energy savings, improved service to their customers and increased credibility.

Ann Kirkpatrick with Xcel Energy in Colorado is one such manager. As Xcel Energy's trade relations manager, Kirkpatrick meets with suppliers and wholesalers to discuss new energy programs and help inform plumbing contractors about the ben-

efits of selling highly efficient water heaters.

According to Ann, "Plumbing contractors want to maximize their business opportunities as much as possible, and ENERGY STAR water heaters coupled with the programs offered by many local efficiency program administrators provide them with many benefits."

Just what are those benefits? The number one benefit for plumbing contractors is that energy efficient water heaters can help their customers get their utility bills under control. For example, most Americans have conventional water heaters that are barely more efficient than ones sold 20 years ago. Today's new ENERGY STAR qualified water heaters include smart design enhancements that offer significant improvements in efficiency and performance. Depending on the technology chosen, consumers can cut their water heating costs in half.¹

In addition to simply serving their customers better, understanding the consumer's demand for and benefits from a higher efficiency water heater can help make the sale happen: knowledgeable plumbing contractors have more credibility with the consumer.

"Here at Blue Sky Plumbing & Heating we always give the customer what they want," said owner Steve Lanyon, "and what many of our cus-

tomers want today is energy efficiency."

In order to help consumers find the water heaters that are right for their homes, it's important to keep up with technologies. Many utility efficiency programs provide literature on high-efficiency products. By contacting local utilities to obtain copies of pamphlets and brochures, plumbing contractors can provide this information directly to the consumer to show the value of energy-efficient products and increase their own credibility as an expert in their field.

According to Lanyon, "Xcel Energy's high efficiency equipment rebates and educational programs certainly give us additional sales tools and credibility in our water heater sales presentations."

Not all utilities offer the same benefits and programs, but it's worth making the call to see how your utility can help you. Xcel Energy provides a good example of the types of benefits a local utility may offer.

Xcel Energy's programs include consumer rebates on energy efficient models for consumers, classes on how to better sell those models, and brochures, newsletters and online tools about energy efficiency. As part of Xcel Energy's programs, Kirkpatrick goes on the road to help plumbing contractors and contractors in her area inform consumers about the benefits of an energy effi-

cient water heater.

Kirkpatrick tells plumbing contractors and contractors to stress a few specific points when talking with consumers--cost savings in energy bills and maintenance; the comfort, health and safety these models provide; and durability of the product. ENERGY STAR models might also give consumers a competitive advantage when they resell their home in the future. They allow them to contribute to our nation's goal of conserving energy resources.

Xcel Energy in Colorado isn't the only utility company that offers energy efficient programs and benefits. "Contractors should contact their local utilities and ask about these programs," Kirkpatrick said. "They need to find out how their utility can work for them."

Established in 1992, ENERGY STAR is a joint program of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Department of Energy designed to save money and help address climate change through energy-efficient products and practices at home and at work. For more information, visit www.energystar.gov or call 1-888-STAR-YES. ■

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1: Source: ENERGY STAR Web site: http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=water_heater_pr_water_heaters

SUPPLIERS' FAVORITE FIELD REPORTS/SPOTLIGHTS

***Provided by the manufacturers
whose products you sell & install***

A.O. Smith Corporation	44	Liberty Pumps	58
Benjamin Franklin Plumbing	32	Precision Hydronic Products	42
Bradford White	56	Rheem	34
Brass Craft	48	RIDGID	36
Chicago Faucets.....	64	Stiebel Eltron	40
Eternal Hybrid	50	Taco.....	62
General Pipe Cleaners.....	54	Viega.....	38
Heat-Flo Heating Products	46	Watts	66
Heat Transfer Products.....	52	Woodford Mfg.....	60