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Orange to green: What you can do

Advice from Progress Energy

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The climate-change summit being hosted today in Orlando by Orange County Mayor Rich Crotty is a welcome step toward increasing regional awareness of an issue that is making news all over the world. The presidential candidates are talking about climate change, and so are your neighbors at the local coffee shop.

Progress Energy strongly supports Crotty's vision for a greener Orange County, and we commend him for leading regional efforts on this vital issue. Central Florida is one of the fastest growing areas of the country, and demand for electricity in our service area is expected to increase by 25 percent in the next 10 years. Last year, we added 50,000 new customers and population growth is expected to continue. The average new home in Florida is 54 percent larger than it was in 1970, with more energy-consuming appliances than ever before. Florida ranks third nationally in energy consumption.

Central Florida is also on the leading edge of renewable-energy projects and technologies that hold great promise. The first hydrogen-fueling station in the state is in Orange County at one of our operating centers, and a second is on the way in Seminole County. A proposed biomass power plant that uses environmentally friendly E-grass as a fuel source is likely to be built in Central Florida.

And last week at Forest High School in Ocala, we launched our latest energy-efficiency initiative that allows customers to fund the installation of solar photovoltaic systems in public schools to generate electricity and student interest in the sun as the world's oldest renewable-energy resource.

As president of the state's second-largest investor-owned utility, I am often asked by customers how they can make a difference in an issue as big and complex as climate change. What can individuals do to help solve a global problem?

For a start, you can consider some simple lifestyle changes. Here are a few:

First, if you're a Progress Energy customer, sign up for our free home-energy check. Our efficiency experts are trained to identify ways to manage your electrical usage and reduce your bill. You can also qualify for rebates and incentives for installing energy-efficient appliances and making home improvements. Crotty recently set a personal example for others to follow by allowing us to perform an energy check at his home. For more information, visit savethewatts.com.

As they burn out, replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs. CFLs use 75 percent less energy than conventional incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer. If every one of our residential customers replaced just one incandescent bulb with a CFL, it would prevent the emission of 200,000 tons of greenhouse gases annually.

Set your air-conditioning system at the highest comfortable setting. In warm weather, every degree above 78 will save up to 10 percent on your electric bill. In cold weather, set your thermostat between 68 and 70 degrees during the day and between 60 and 65 at night.

Choose Energy Star-rated appliances for your home. Energy Star is the federal government's seal of approval for appliances that are highly energy efficient.

Using energy wisely is not only the smart thing to do economically; it's a moral and civic obligation. Working together, we must align culture, policy and technology with a personal commitment to change. We hope the climate at today's summit is receptive to that way of thinking.

Jeff Lyash is president and CEO of Progress Energy Florida, which serves 1.7 million customers in Central and West-Coastal Florida.

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