

Summary: Opportunities for Improving Access to Energy Efficiency

- Working Group on Efficiency of the Hawaii Energy Policy Forum

As part of the Hawaii Energy Policy Project, a working group was formed to address the issue of Improving Access to Energy Efficiency. The working group consisted of representatives from federal, state and local governments, the building industry, Honolulu Community Action Group (HCAP) and utility personnel. The primary focus of the working group was low-to-moderate income families in the residential sector. As the group explored the issues related to energy efficiency, it became apparent that the majority of residential energy users in Hawaii also faced many of the same challenges encountered by lower income families.

The group explored the challenges with the adoption of energy efficiency and several barriers were identified. One of the major issues identified was the higher initial costs of energy efficiency measures such as solar water heating and high efficiency refrigerators. This initial cost challenge is even more significant for lower income households. For renters, this barrier is amplified because the landlord lacks incentives to make an investment that will result in savings for a tenant.

Awareness and understanding of energy issues, knowledge of newer energy savings devices, and the full impact of energy use created barriers for change. In some cases, engineers and architects are reticent to specify new technology due to perceived risk if something goes wrong. The group concluded that consumers and designers could make better decisions provided with better information.

Despite the challenges, many successes were noted. Utility Demand Side Management (DSM) programs and tax incentives have resulted in more solar water heating per capita being used in Hawaii than any other state. Adoption of the model energy codes has meant that new construction and renovation are more efficient. More and more architects and engineers are learning about energy efficient designs and sustainable practices. Recently, the City and County of Honolulu initiated a

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program for low interest loans for qualifying low-income home-owners and landlords who rent to qualifying tenants.

The working group identified the following opportunities for consideration:

- Opportunity 1 – Implement Energy Awareness and Education Program
- Opportunity 2 – Encourage Revisions to LIHEAP
- Opportunity 3 – Continue Current DSM Programs Offered by Utilities
- Opportunity 4 – Consider New Utility DSM Programs
- Opportunity 5 – Seek Additional Sources of Federal Funding
- Opportunity 6 – Enhance Current and Develop New Public-Private Partnerships to Encourage Energy Efficiency and Conservation
- Opportunity 7 – Reduce the Tax Burden of Hawai'i Residents by making Energy Cost Reduction a Priority for State and County Governments
- Opportunity 8 – Create Additional Low-income Loan Programs
- Opportunity 9 – Expand the Scope of the Model Energy Code
- Opportunity 10 – Multi-family Housing Unit Design