

January 14, 2011

Forest City Residents are now in live billing phase for excessive energy use

Story and Photo by Paris M. Cousin
Navy Housing Hawaii Forest City Residential Management



Jan. 1 marked the start of the live billing phase in the Department of Navy's Resident Energy Conservation Program (RECP). This means that residents in Forest City Communities are now responsible for the electricity they consume in their home.

The good news is that residents only have to pay for excessive use—in other words, only for the use that exceeds 20 percent of an established average for their like-type group of homes. Residents who do not exceed this buffer will not be billed for electricity, and residents whose monthly use is more than 20 percent below the average will actually get a rebate.

Forest City residents received a mock electric bill each month for the past three months. The mock bill allowed each resident to see how their monthly consumption compared to others living in similar homes in their neighborhood. Residents will receive their last mock bill approximately Jan. 15. The mock bill will show them their use for the month of December, and they will receive their first live bill in mid-February for their January use.

The RECP is the Navy and Marine Corps' pilot program that complies with Department of Defense policy for military services to encourage residents in public-private venture (PPV) housing to conserve energy. The policy mandated that PPV projects establish a utility allowance based on a reasonable estimate of average consumption for each geographic area.

Residents who conserved utilities could keep the difference between the allowance and the actual cost, while those who exceeded the allowance would pay out-of-pocket for excessive use. The Air Force and Army have already implemented similar programs across the country, and locally, residents living in Army PPV housing are in the midst of their mock billing period.

Military members receive a monthly housing allowance that is computed based on local price data to cover market rent, average utilities and average renter's insurance. The Department of the Navy and Forest City jointly established average electricity baselines within each Forest City neighborhood, based on size, number of bedrooms and similar construction. This methodology ensured resident consumption was compared to a more appropriate average of like-type Forest City homes versus homes in the civilian community.

During the mock billing period, Forest City sent home assessment teams to visit those homes where monthly electricity use was much higher than in similar homes. According to Greg Raap, Forest City's director of property management, the teams found the following common factors in these homes:

* Some residents were not using compact fluorescent lamp (CFL) bulbs. According to Hawaiian Electric Company (HECO), every incandescent bulb is costing approximately \$1 per month more than a CFL. Some homes had an additional appliance, such as portable air conditioner, dehumidifier, extra refrigerator or freezer. HECO says a portable air conditioner can cost anywhere from \$48 to \$74 per month to operate, depending on size. An extra refrigerator or freezer can cost anywhere from \$20 to \$50 per month.

* Other homes had solar water heater timers that were being used incorrectly. When running on electricity only, the water heater can cost more than \$100 per month. Having the timer clock set correctly can reduce this cost by 80 percent by using the sun to heat water during the day. Instructions on how to set your solar water heater timing box can be found on Forest City's website at www.fcnavyhawaii.com under the RECP tab.

* Many homes had low air conditioning temperature settings. Per HECO, each degree the thermostat is set above 75 will reduce energy use by three percent.

Many Forest City residents have taken advantage of the website tool, <http://www.yardiutilities.com>, to frequently check the electricity use of their own home during the month and see what their end-of-month bill would look like based on their current use.

Kari Diaz, Forest City general manager, said, "Over 900 residents have completed the easy registration and their use of the website has certainly helped them reduce energy consumption. The web-site provides daily updates for household consumption and our most energy-conscious neighbors check it quite often to track their progress."

Data collected during the mock billing period indicate the average consumption per Forest City home in September, October and November has been about eight percent lower than the average consumption a year ago for each of those months.

According to Darryl Nii, Navy Region Hawaii PPV program director, the RECP concept for PPV residents to pay for utilities is similar to what the majority of military members stationed in Hawaii are already doing, but better. Approximately 55 percent of the Hawaii military population live in community housing and pay their entire electric bill-and sometimes water bill as well. Forest City residents will only pay for electricity use that exceeds 20 percent of the monthly average usage for their like-type homes.

There are two noteworthy benefits to the RECP, Nii added. "First, it helps the ecosystem and reduces the nation's dependence on foreign oil. Second, it reduces the PPV project's electric bill where the lion's share of money not spent on utilities is used toward operations, maintenance and long-term reinvestments in the homes and neighborhood," he said.

"Sailors and their families are the primary beneficiaries from utility conservation because it's their homes and neighborhoods that get improved," he explained.

For more information about the RECP, residents should contact Darryl Nii, Navy Region Hawaii, at 474-1825 or Darryl.nii@navy.mil or their Forest City Resident Services office. The Navy Region Hawaii RECP website is at <http://greatlifehawaii.com/recp>.
