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Sarasota County receives grant to support home energy efficiency

Sarasota County has been awarded approximately \$2.5 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to support energy efficiency and conservation activities. The county is currently finalizing a strategy for how it will implement the proposed projects and programs to achieve energy savings, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create or retain jobs.

The award comes from the U.S. Department of Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program, which is distributing \$3.2 billion nationwide to help more than 2,300 cities, counties, states and Indian tribes nationwide improve energy efficiency, reduce energy use and fossil fuel emissions, and create green jobs locally.

“This grant represents a tremendous opportunity for Sarasota County to build upon its commitment to achieving a sustainable community and to support its citizens in efforts to reduce their energy use,” said Amy Meese, general manager for Sarasota County Natural Resources.

Meese said that a portion of the grant will be used to save taxpayer dollars through retrofits to county buildings. The remainder will be devoted to a system of energy audits and incentives for home energy improvements through loans and rebates. Another part of the plan is helping residents achieve significant energy savings by educating them about the many energy-saving resources already available.

“Our primary goal is get this money into the local economy quickly and efficiently to support our local economy,” said Meese. “The first steps are to develop an application process and put people in place to administer the program.”

According to Meese, the county plans to release more details about the program by November, and funds will probably begin being released after January 2010.

Eligibility depends on residency. Because the grant was awarded to Sarasota County, only residents living within unincorporated Sarasota County will be eligible for the county funds. The cities of Sarasota and North Port also are eligible for smaller EECBG allocations, so residents living within those cities also will be able to access funds awarded to those cities.

U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu said, "With these grants, communities across the country will be able to make major investments in energy solutions that will strengthen America's economy and create jobs at the local level."

For more information about Sarasota County's sustainability efforts, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000. For more information about the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program, visit www.eecbg.energy.gov.