

GE agrees to join St. Lucie in boosting energy efficiency in county

By Eric Pfahler

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ST. LUCIE COUNTY — County officials say another major partner has agreed to help residents obtain more energy-efficient and renewable-energy products, putting savings into citizens' pockets while enhancing the county's green reputation.

General Electric Co. will join Oak Ridge National Laboratory in working with the county to help residents get money-saving products without spending large amounts of money up front, county officials said.

Officials offered few details Tuesday on GE's role, though one company official said it might involve GE assisting consumers with loans on products. Officials said specifics might be ready by the end of this year.

There are, however, several projects to improve the area's energy efficiency already under way.

The county is creating a loan fund to help people buy appliances such as solar water heaters. And the county, with other entities such as Port St. Lucie, Fort Pierce and Indian River State College, has an agreement with the famed Oak Ridge laboratory that could certify products and make it easier for consumers to see the value of energy-efficient options.

GE might bolster those efforts, for example, by lending money and joining the county in helping residents buy products, said Kevin Decker, a GE government program leader.

"An average consumer would have someone knock on the door from the government and say, 'Hey, here are your options. You have this lending option, this lending option from GE, here is a suite of solutions that you might want to consider upgrading your home with that will eventually save you money in the very short term,'" Decker said of one way the agreement might work.

The county and IRSC also have separate training programs for workers seeking to learn about energy efficient technology. GE and Oak Ridge could help individuals train and find work if area residents create a demand for energy-efficient products.

Those ongoing efforts helped draw GE into the picture, at least on the conceptual level, Decker said.

“We have broad swaths of the projects we want to go work on, and everyone’s excited to do that very quickly,” Decker said. “Of course, the details are still being hammered out.”

While GE did not join just because of the agreement with Oak Ridge, the county’s ongoing projects helped entice GE to become a partner, Decker said. The county and cities are not committing tax dollars to the deal.

“Clearly it’s attractive to us to see a community who’s already engaged in partnerships like this,” Decker said. “Obviously it adds to the county’s credibility. It lets us know they’re really serious about doing something like this.”



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