

By Brianna Boyd

*Advocacy Council Meeting  
June 11, 2019*

Over the last four years, the Pacific Gas & Electric Company's Energy Watch program, administered locally through the Solano Economic Development Corporation, has helped over 500 area businesses to see \$2.6 million in energy savings and \$1.8 million in rebates.

According to a recent report from the Solano EDC, the savings from the Solano Energy Watch program amounts to 12.43 million kilowatt-hours, or the equivalent of the energy used in 921 homes for one year.

"We've been able to help a lot of people," said Solano EDC President Robert Burris, "and we want to help more."

Burris was the guest speaker at the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber's Advocacy Council meeting June 11, where he highlighted Solano Energy Watch and its growth since 2014.

Solano Energy Watch began in 2014 when PG&E, with funding from the Public Utilities Commission, approached Economic Development Corporations across the state with a proposal designed to decrease energy loads on power grids and provide an economic benefit to organizations and businesses. The Public Utilities Commission and PG&E would take care of all funding, while the EDC's would serve as the marketing arm of the program.

The Solano EDC, in turn, welcomed J. Paul Harrington to their team as the program director. Since he joined the EDC, he has outreached over 1,000 area businesses.

While any business can apply for the program, Solano Energy Watch is geared towards smaller family-owned businesses, restaurants and organizations, with 10 or fewer employees. These are businesses that typically could not afford the upfront costs of improvements on their own.

Applicants must meet a certain kilowatt usage cap in electricity prior to approval. Once approved, Harrington visits the business, does a survey to see what type of retrofits can be done, and then submits his report to PG&E. Most of the audits are focused on lighting, HVAC. Or refrigeration retrofits. The power company then contracts with a local contractor to complete those recommended improvements.

Through the rebate program, which is based on calculations on anticipated savings, contractors are asked to front the costs and are paid as those funds become available. Often, all the work is done at no cost to the business.

“Our projects range from nail salons to small manufacturing and everything in between, however, there are criteria and caps that we have to abide by,” Harrington explained. “We have served the County as well as provided rebates for most of our cities, either directly by providing turnkey services or indirectly by coordinating behind the scenes with larger energy services companies on citywide projects.”

For most of the applicants, the bulk of improvements is related to lighting, Burris said.

“Lighting is the easiest retrofit to do and most people don’t realize it,” he said. “LED lights have improved so much in recent years. An LED light today uses one-tenth of the power of a normal, traditional fluorescent light.”

With the retrofits and the ultimate cost-savings, many businesses are saving thousands of dollars without a penny coming out of their own pockets. One of those businesses is the chamber of commerce, which recently had all interior lights replaced through Energy Watch.

“We’ve done small retail shops all the way to warehouses,” Burris said. “For companies with outdoor yards, those extended LED lights have been a real cost savings.”

For more information on the Solano Energy Watch and how your business can be a part of the program, contact J. Paul Harrington at [jpaul@solanoedc.org](mailto:jpaul@solanoedc.org) or by phone at 707-864-1855.