

EPE program seeks to curb peak energy use

Jason Gibbs, Las Cruces Sun-News 12:00 p.m. MT March 12, 2017



(Photo: VIC KOLENC/EL PASO TIMES)

LAS CRUCES – El Paso Electric wants you to let them keep a finger on your thermostat this summer.

The company is rolling out a pilot program to test the potential savings of keeping homes a couple of degrees warmer during peak demand times. For New Mexico, that comes from June through September, when we desert dwellers turn up the air conditioners.

The program will allow [EPE](#) to tap into participating customers' smart thermostats to raise the temperature. The goal is to see how much energy could be saved by shaving the demand down during peak hours, said George De La Torre, a spokesman for the company.

EPE will launch the program in late April for 3,000 customers in New Mexico and Texas markets. Customers who voluntarily join the program must have central refrigerated air conditioning controlled by an eligible smart thermostat provided by and installed by the

customer. When a “peak event” occurs, EPE will send a signal to the customer’s smart thermostat to modify the temperature setting in an attempt to reduce overall load demand. Customers will be notified by text or email and can opt out of specific events if needed, De La Torre said.

Participants receive a one-time incentive of \$125 and an annual \$25 incentive for the three-year test. They should also realize lower electricity bills due to reduced use.

The plan was fast-tracked by the state Public Regulation Commission in February in order to have it implemented by this summer. [PRC Commissioner Sandy Jones](#) said it is an effort to minimize the number of additional plants the utility company has to build and maintain just to turn on for a few peak hours each year.

“The companies have to be prepared for those summer afternoons when there load is increased,” Jones said. “Because of that, you use a small amount of that generation (capacity) for a small amount of time. Over the year they don’t get utilized that much.”

De La Torre noted that the pilot project is an attempt to reduce that peak demand, which continues to grow. The company’s customer growth rate continues to be about 1.5 percent, but the peak demand last year rose 5.5 percent, he said.

[Sen. Bill Soules](#), D-Las Cruces, said it was a move in the right direction, although the test size of 3,000 units is too small to make a significant difference in overall demand.

“Moving toward smart systems of this sort is the right thing to do,” Soules said.

He noted that New Mexico State University uses a similar control on some of its facilities. NMSU does not use the same E-Smart program, but has many buildings with intelligent controls, one of which is called Niagra, according to campus officials. Being able to remotely adjust demand during peak use hours on a wider scale across southern New Mexico would minimize future costs associated with EPE building and maintaining generation systems that are turned on for a few hours during only a few days of the summer.

“We should be doing that across the system,” Soules said. “We ought to be moving toward more smart systems to level those peaks.”

Interested customers should call the EPE Customer Service line at 575-526-5555.

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