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Electric co-ops hope to plug public into conservation

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Two weeks after dedicating a new solar panel, Mauldin Middle School was the site of another step forward in energy conservation.

The "major announcement," according to Mike Couick, CEO of the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina Inc., was a commitment of up to \$10 million toward homegrown solutions that would make electric service environmentally responsible.

ECSC, made of 20 co-ops statewide, plans to save energy by delivering 7 million compact fluorescent (CFL) bulbs and initiating a net metering pilot project that will pay customers back for excess energy generated, officials said.

A CFL bulb lasts 10 times longer than a regular incandescent bulb, uses 75 percent less energy and saves 450 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions, they said.

Advertisement Fourth District U.S. House Rep. Bob Inglis, introduced at Monday's event as "Mr. Innovation," already uses the CFLs.

He is also promoting a bill in Congress that requires all 3 million government bulbs, upon burnout, to be replaced with CFLs. He estimates that would save about \$90 million.

The money could be used to further research into green power and energy conservation, he said.

"We've been to the moon and all that, but we still haven't cracked this yet," he said.

Two recent studies by ECSC addressing conservation and renewable energy show that all the renewable energy sources, if fully deployed, would meet only 3 to 5 percent of the electrical energy requirements in the state's more than 2 million homes, said Ron Calcaterra, CEO of the Central Electric Power Cooperative.

"The bottom line of that study" is that "over a 10-year period, we could save between 5 and 20 percent of our energy use," he said.
