

Pilot helps residents to save money

Power assessments suggest changes

Laurilee McMichael

An energy-saving pilot programme at the southern end of the lake is saving Tūrangi-Tongariro residents big money in power bills.

The programme is a partnership between the King Country Electric Power Trust (KCEPT) and private company Ecobulbs and has been co-funded \$300,000 in a 50/50 split between the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Enterprise and the King Country Electric Power Trust.

The programme is free and allows people to potentially make big savings on their electricity. There are no qualifying criteria.

Anybody living in the KCEPT area (Tūrangi-Taumarunui-Ohakune) is eligible for a free energy efficiency and education assessment. So far, 902 assessments have been done, 565 of them in the Tūrangi area alone.

Trained energy assessors go to people's homes and do an energy assessment, using a software tool that Ecobulbs has developed.

The assessment tool can show potential savings in areas where homes use power so people can see for themselves what it would mean to, for example, turn off a second fridge in the garage that is only chilling a couple of items.

The assessors also provide devices at no cost that will help reduce power bills such as energy efficient LED ecobulbs and low flow shower heads.

Lead assessor Ramona Salvador has conducted many of the energy assessments and says the most obvious and easiest change is for people to switch from incandescent light bulbs to energy-efficient LED light bulbs. The average home replaces around 15 old-style light bulbs with the LED eco bulbs, which immediately cuts energy use.

The other big place to save energy is the shower, Ramona says.

"We go into the shower with a bucket that we are all given and we turn the shower on to the temperature that they would shower with and let it run for 15 seconds and then stop it. In the bucket are measurements. Two litres isn't too bad but if they have three litres they need to change their shower head – that's 12 litres [of hot water] a minute."

If people don't want to replace their shower head with a lower flow one, they can still save. Reducing the length of the shower time by a minute per person all helps, Ramona says.

Assessors also look at heat pumps. Ramona says the assessors will show people how to clean their heat pump filters and that simple action can make a big difference.



Lead energy assessor Ramona Salvador and Tūrangi resident Ruth Hartley work through the assessment tool that shows where home energy savings can be made.

There's also a widespread belief that running heat pumps all day is more efficient. Ramona says this isn't true. "Turn it off when you go away or go out of the room because it doesn't take long to warm a room up with a heat pump."

The other problem is people setting their heat pump at an excessively high temperatures – 25 to 30 degrees is not uncommon.

"A lot of them do it because they haven't cleaned the filters so they need more power to get the heat out."

At the end, the residents receive a copy of the assessment, showing where they can make energy savings.

Residents are also encouraged to visit Consumer NZ's Powerswitch website to see whether they are with the right energy retailer or right energy plan for their needs, where further savings can potentially be made.

King Country Electric Power Trust trustee Sandra Greenslade says the

average annual savings for most homes has been \$800 which is the combined result of energy savings, low flow shower heads, eco bulbs and switching to the right power plan and provider. Almost every home has some area where savings could be made, she says.

"We only found two homes in the district that we couldn't find savings on."

For people who don't want a home visit, there have been free power assessments in the Tūrangi Senior Citizens Hall and at Omori Hall and around 70 people have been seen via that method. The project has also created local jobs. The project partnered with Tūwharetoa Health Charitable Trust to identify suitable people to train as assessors.

"That was very important because it got people who are closely involved with the Tūrangi community," Sandra says.

Tūrangi woman Ruth Hartley had an energy assessment done at her home.

"What I liked about it was that I could save money because it was comparing my usage with what they were assessing me on," she says.

As well as the savings she was able to make at home, Ruth was also able to save \$300 per annum on her power bill by switching to a different retailer with a different plan.

The programme reaches people through word of mouth, personal, family and community connections and Facebook.

i The project is beginning to wind up but if you haven't had a free power assessment and live in the Tūrangi-Tongariro area, there is still time. Contact Ramona Salvador at ramonasalvador56@gmail.com.