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**Minnesota Chamber announces launch of Energy Smart program**  
*Energy Smart to help Minnesota businesses save money through energy efficiency*

ST. PAUL – Oct. 8 – Minnesota businesses have a new resource for improving energy efficiency and saving money. Energy Smart, a program of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, is a statewide initiative designed to help businesses save money by taking advantage of conservation programs and increasing energy efficiency in their buildings and operations.

"We're here to help businesses save money through energy efficiency," said Mark Blaiser, executive director of Minnesota Waste Wise, an affiliate program of the Minnesota Chamber which operates this new initiative. "Energy Smart will help connect businesses to existing energy efficiency programs offered by the state's energy utilities. Saving energy is smart business."

Minnesota Waste Wise has 15 years of experience delivering strategic sustainability consulting that helps businesses save money through waste reduction, resource conservation and now energy efficiency.

Energy costs make up a big portion of most businesses' annual operating costs, and those costs are rising, Blaiser noted. Energy Smart will connect businesses with current Conservation Improvement Programs (CIPs) offered by the state's utilities and other resources that can analyze a company's energy usage, efficiency upgrade options, potential cost savings and available financial incentives. Energy Smart is intended to provide businesses with the information and tools needed to make informed choices about their energy use and efficiency upgrade options.

The contract for Energy Smart, a pilot alternative CIP for 2008-09, was awarded by the Minnesota Office of Energy Security for inclusion in Minnesota electric utility CIP plans. It is funded by the state's four largest utilities – Xcel Energy, Minnesota Power, Otter Tail Power, and Interstate Power and Light. State law requires utilities to reduce electricity demand in specific increments on an annual basis.

"Energy Smart has the potential to significantly increase business participation in energy conservation utility programs," said Bill Glahn, director of the Minnesota Office of Energy Security and deputy commissioner of the Department of Commerce. He referenced a 2008 survey of small to midsized businesses conducted by the Minnesota Environmental Initiative,

which revealed ample opportunity for improved marketing to increase awareness and utilization of energy efficiency programs and resources.

“Increased participation in utility CIPs, particularly on the part of Minnesota businesses, is a critical element of achieving the conservation goal that has been established for Minnesota as a part of Minnesota’s Next Generation Energy Act of 2007,” Glahn said. Those goals include a 25-percent renewable energy standard by 2025, as well as a goal of 1,000 Energy Star-rated buildings in Minnesota by 2010.

“Many large companies have staff looking closely at reducing energy consumption and are seeing significant cost savings through efficiency upgrades,” Blaiser said. “That isn’t the norm for most small and medium-size businesses. That’s where we come in. We can connect them with the appropriate resources.”

A lighting upgrade alone could save a business 35 percent of its lighting costs, Blaiser noted. Rebates, grants and low-interest loans are available from utility programs if a business implements certain energy efficiency upgrades. These financial incentives can help recoup some of the up-front investment costs to the business.

"Minnesota businesses have high potential for energy savings – especially small and midsize companies," Blaiser said. "We're here to make the process easier and to help businesses understand how energy efficiency translates into lower operating costs."

For further information about the program, businesses should contact Jill Curran, Energy Smart program manager, at (651) 292-4653 or [jcurran@mnchamber.com](mailto:jcurran@mnchamber.com), or visit the Web site at [www.mnenergysmart.com](http://www.mnenergysmart.com).

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