

Xcel Targets Smart Habits

PLAN FOR BOULDER

The city is tapped for a pilot program that is designed to help Colorado's largest utility improve energy efficiency.

Xcel Energy said Wednesday that it will make Boulder its first "Smart Grid City," as part of a program that will allow the utility to better monitor and manage power consumption.

Minneapolis-based Xcel, Colorado's dominant power supplier, leads a consortium of five companies that plan to invest up to \$100 million over the next several years to advance its environmental and energy-efficiency strategies.

"We're excited. It's the next logical step after wind and solar," said Xcel chairman and CEO Dick Kelly, who said Boulder was picked because it met the criteria for the pilot program.

"We were looking for a city with about 100,000 customers so we could have a meaningful number of customers (participating)," Kelly said. "We wanted people that weren't afraid of technology or were excited about technology."

A Smart Grid City would allow Xcel, and eventually customers, to deter mine peak usage hours and change consumption habits and rates accordingly.

For Boulder, the Smart Grid project, combined with the growth of renewable energy startups in the area, the University of Colorado, the National Renewable Energy Lab, and Conoco Phillips coming to nearby Louisville, may be a boon for economic development.

"I think it's going to be a net positive in so many ways we're just now starting to understand and quantify," said Boulder City Manager Frank Bruno, who said Boulder officials were in talks with Xcel over the past six weeks.

Xcel plans to assess the city's infrastructure over the next four to six weeks to develop a grid-enhancement plan. The company is then expected to make upgrades on its equipment, substations and transformers. Advances such as recharging stations for hybrid electric cars, wind turbines and solar panels will not come online until 2009.

"With Boulder as America's first Smart Grid City, Xcel Energy is showcasing precisely why Colorado is fast becoming an international leader in the New Energy Economy, in modern energy — and now in smart energy," Gov. Bill Ritter said in written statement.