

Energy Conservation through Trees Act One-Page Summary

WHAT THE BILL DOES

The Energy Conservation through Trees Act creates a grant program to assist electric utilities with programs that use targeted planting of shade trees to reduce residential energy demand.

The purpose of the legislation is to help homeowners lower their electric bills (and help utilities lower their peak load demand) by reducing residential energy demand caused by the need to run air conditioners and heaters at a high level. Shade trees not only help mitigate the urban heat island effect, but also help to shield homes from sun in the summer and cold winds in the winter.

Guidelines: The legislation requires the use of science-based tree-siting guidelines to ensure that trees are not planted in locations that will disrupt pre-existing infrastructure, block solar panels and wind turbines, or damage power lines. Consultation during the development of these guidelines must be provided by Technical Advisory Committees that are composed of local energy and arboricultural experts.

Partnerships: The legislation requires utilities that receive assistance to partner with nonprofit tree-planting organizations or other municipal infrastructure groups to run the technical side of the program. These nonprofit groups are meant to serve as tree-planting experts to complement utilities' financial interest in lowering peak energy demand and reducing consumption. They will provide technical and outreach assistance, work with tree recipients, and ensure that trees are planted in the right place to maximize energy conservation.

Cost Sharing: The bill contains a requirement that all Federal funds be matched at least one-to-one with non-Federal dollars.

BENEFITS OF STRATEGICALLY-PLANTED TREES

Planting shade trees around homes in a strategic manner is a proven way to lower energy demand in residential areas. According to research conducted by the Department of Energy, three shade trees strategically planted around a house can reduce home air-conditioning bills by about 30 percent in some cities, and a nationwide shade program could reduce air-conditioning use by at least 10 percent.

Shade trees also help to:

- Improve public health and air quality by absorbing particulate matter;
- Store carbon dioxide to help slow global warming;
- Reduce the risk of flooding in urban areas by absorbing stormwater runoff;
- Improve private property values and increase residential aesthetics;
- Preserve public infrastructure, such as streets and sidewalks.

SUPPORT FOR CONSERVING ENERGY THROUGH TREES

Conserving energy through the use of strategically-planted trees is supported by the following organizations:

National Arbor Day Foundation; Alliance for Community Trees; Pacific Gas and Electric Company; American Forests; Sacramento Municipal Utility District; American Public Power Association; International Society of Arborists; American Public Works Association; California Urban Forests Council; Urban Ecology Institute; Utility Arborists Association; California ReLeaf; American Society of Landscape Architects; Trees Atlanta; Friends of Trees.