

December 22, 2010

Features

Congress Extends Federal Energy Efficiency Tax Credits

On December 16, Congress extended the \$2,000 federal tax credit for builders who build energy efficient homes. The extension is from January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2011. The extension was part of a sweeping tax package negotiated by the White House and Republican Congressional leaders.

The legislation also includes a provision that extends the tax credit for consumers who purchase qualified energy saving products, but lowers the credit to its pre-economic recovery act levels. The new bill extends the credit to the end of 2011, but reduces the incentive to the original 10 percent up to \$500. Included are provisions limiting window incentives to \$200, oil and gas furnace and boiler incentives to \$150-200, and water heater and wood heating system incentives to \$300. As part of the legislation, Congress is tightening the specifications for oil furnaces and boilers and gas boilers to 95 percent efficiency, up from the 90 percent efficiency in current credit.

The tax credit for highly energy efficient appliances was extended for one year, and the efficiency criteria and incentives have been updated to provide incentives only for products that are significantly more efficient than today's average new product. The credit goes to manufacturers.

[\[More\]](#)

Florida, Arizona Expect Large Population Influx in 2011

Although the article on Forbes.com is titled "States People Are Fleeing," the real message in the story is that "Florida and Arizona are expected to receive an influx of hundreds of thousands of people this coming year". Retirees are attracted to states with temperate climates, affordable costs of living, good health care and pretty scenery [\[More\]](#)

The Villages, Palm Coast Some of Fastest Growing Small Towns

Despite the state of Florida's catastrophic real estate bust, certain communities in the state are still flourishing. The Villages, Fla., a haven for retirees, saw its population increase by 13% to 77,681 in 2009. And while Palm Coast, Fla., isn't a retirement community, the housing bust didn't slow it down. The area, which is home to several mid-size businesses, has seen its population grow rapidly since 1990, and it's still going strong. From 2006 to 2009 Palm Coast's population grew 10.3% to 91,622. [\[More\]](#)

Job Openings Announced by CLEARResult

CLEARResult is an energy-efficiency consulting firm that develops and implements energy-efficiency programs on behalf of utility companies across the country. Their programs are designed to help utilities manage load growth and meet legislative requirements by identifying energy savings opportunities and implementing energy-efficiency improvements. CLEARResult is ranked #144 by *Inc. Magazine* on its list of the 500 fastest-growing firms in the U.S., and they are #5 on the magazine's list of fastest-growing companies within the energy sector. Current job openings are regular, full-time, permanent positions with full benefits. The job descriptions for all of these openings can be viewed on the [CLEARResult web site](http://www.clearesult.com) (www.clearesult.com).

DOE Funds \$30 Million for Biofuels Research

The US Department of Energy (DOE) is now accepting applications for up to \$30 million in funding small-scale projects for development of biofuels to replace gasoline or diesel without requiring special upgrades or changes to the vehicle or fueling infrastructure. The Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) provides up to \$30 million over the next three to four years to support as many as five projects. The projects will focus on optimizing and integrating process steps that convert biomass into biofuels and bioproducts that will eventually be used to support hydrocarbon

fuels and chemicals. These process improvements could include pretreatment methods that alter the biomass to improve the yield of sugars in subsequent process steps, less costly and more efficient enzymes that produce sugars, and fermentation organisms and catalysts that convert the sugars into fuel and chemical intermediates. Successful applicants will demonstrate the research potential to improve the economics and efficiency of their proposed process. A description of the solicitation, eligibility requirements, and application instructions can be found on the FedConnect Website under Reference Number DE-FOA-0000337. Applications must be submitted through Grants.gov by no later than February 7, 2011.

Interior Department Launches Atlantic Offshore Wind Energy Initiative

The Department of the Interior (DOI) on November 23 launched a "Smart from the Start" wind energy initiative to speed offshore wind development on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf. The program is designed to spur development of offshore wind resources by facilitating how new projects are sited, leased, and constructed. The accelerated leasing process is being simplified through a regulatory change so that leases may be issued in 2011 or early 2012. Under the Smart from the Start initiative, DOI's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE) is proposing a revision to its regulations that will cut the red tape for offshore leasing when there is only one qualified, interested developer. The new Smart from the Start approach would focus on "wind energy areas" (WEA), offshore locations that appear most suitable for wind energy development. Within the next 60 days, BOEMRE will work with states to identify WEAs off the coasts of Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Virginia. By January 2011, Requests for Interest and Calls for Information will be issued for these new WEAs to support lease-sale environmental assessments. Additional WEAs will be identified in 2011 for other Atlantic states, which may include Georgia, Maine, New York, North Carolina, and South Carolina. [\[More\]](#)

HUD's PowerSaver Program to Offer Financing for Energy-Saving Home Improvements

The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) announced a new pilot program that will offer creditworthy borrowers low-cost loans to make energy-saving improvements to their homes. Backed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), these new FHA PowerSaver loans will offer homeowners up to \$25,000 to make energy-efficient improvements of their choice, including the installation of insulation, duct sealing, doors and windows, HVAC systems, water heaters, solar panels, and geothermal systems.

More homeowners are interested in making their homes energy efficient, according to industry forecasts. Yet options are still limited for financing home energy improvements, especially for the many homeowners who are unable to take out a home equity loan or access an affordable consumer loan. HUD published a notice seeking the participation of a limited number of mortgage lenders in the two-year pilot program slated to begin in early 2011.

Lenders will be selected to participate in the PowerSaver pilot based on their capacity and commitment to provide affordable home energy improvement financing. Lenders will be required to serve communities that have already taken affirmative steps to expand home energy improvements. HUD will help lenders identify such markets—which exist in many suburban, rural and urban areas across the country.

PowerSaver loans will be backed by the FHA—but with significant "skin in the game" from private lenders. FHA mortgage insurance will cover up to 90 percent of the loan amount in the event of default. Lenders will retain the remaining risk on each loan, incentivizing responsible underwriting and lending standards. FHA will provide streamlined insurance claims payment procedures on PowerSaver loans. In addition, lenders may be eligible for incentive grant payments from FHA to enhance benefits to borrowers, such as lowering interest rates.

PowerSaver has been carefully designed to meet a need in the marketplace for borrowers who have the ability and motivation to take on modest additional debt to realize the savings over time from a home energy improvement. PowerSaver loans are only available to borrowers with good credit, manageable overall debt and at least some equity in their home (maximum 100% combined loan to value).

Governor-Elect Urged to Merge DOT, DCA and DEP

Governor-elect Rick Scott is being urged to fold three state agencies – the Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) – into one new agency charged with helping the state grow.

Scott's regulatory reform transition team also called for new limits on lawsuits, reforms to property insurance and streamlining and even eliminating some of the current environmental and growth rules on the books. The report put together by Scott's team contends that there are too many overlapping and redundant rules. But the report also says the biggest challenge to revitalizing the state's economy is not red tape but failed leadership and a failed economic development strategy.

There are currently more than 11,000 employees in DOT, DCA and DEP and combined the agencies this year had budgets of more than \$9 billion. But the report says that Scott should look for efficiencies to decrease the size of the new agency – and then possibly look at merging other agencies including the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in 2012.

The transition team also recommended that license requirements be eliminated for some professionals, such as travel agents and auctioneers. While not providing specifics, the transition team report also suggested a handful of changes regarding lawsuits and insurance. It said that there should be reforms in the use of expert witnesses, Medicaid liability, punitive damages and that eventually emergency rooms and statutory teaching hospitals should be given legal immunity.

The report also said there needs to be changes in sinkhole insurance, as well as personal injury protection or PIP, bad faith liability, as well as Citizens Property Insurance and the Florida Hurricane Catastrophe Fund.

Study Finds Tallahassee, Miami Tap Water Contains Cancer-Causing Chromium-6

Tallahassee ranks 6th in highest in parts per billion of cities tested

Laboratory tests commissioned by Environmental Working Group (EWG) have detected hexavalent chromium, the carcinogenic "Erin Brockovich chemical," in tap water from 31 of 35 American cities. The highest levels were in Norman, Okla.; Honolulu, Hawaii; and Riverside, Calif. In all, water samples from 25 cities contained the toxic metal at concentrations above the safe maximum recently proposed by California regulators.

The National Toxicology Program has concluded that hexavalent chromium (also called chromium-6) in drinking water shows "clear evidence of carcinogenic activity" in laboratory animals, increasing the risk of gastrointestinal tumors. In September 2010, a draft toxicological review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) similarly found that hexavalent chromium in tap water is "likely to be carcinogenic to humans."

In 2009, California officials proposed setting a "public health goal" for hexavalent chromium in drinking water of 0.06 parts per billion (ppb) to reduce cancer risk. This was the first step toward establishing a statewide enforceable limit. Despite mounting evidence of its toxic effects, the EPA has not set a legal limit for hexavalent chromium in tap water nationally and does not require water utilities to test for it. In 25 cities where EWG's testing detected chromium-6 — in the first publicly available national survey for the contaminant — it was found in concentrations exceeding California's proposed maximum, in one case at a level more than 200 times higher. [[More](#)]

Nominations Open for 2011 NAHB Green Building Awards

Each year, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) honors excellence in green residential design, construction practices, and outstanding green advocacy efforts. Applications for the 2011 awards are now being accepted. Award categories include:

- Advocate of the Year (Builder, Remodeler, Individual, Group, HBA)
- Advocate of the Year (State or Local Government)
- Green Project(s) of the Year (Single-Family, Remodel, Multi-family)
- Green Site Development of the Year

Winners will be announced at the Awards Dinner Gala, May 2, 2011 in Salt Lake City as part of the National Green Building Conference & Expo.

Articles of Interest

[Florida Capital Leads with Sustainable Solutions](#)

Nice article about FGBC and City of Tallahassee

[FPL President Thinks Customers Should Pay for Renewable Energy Projects](#)

[Florida TaxWatch Poll: Utility Customers Willing to Pay More for Renewable Energy](#)

[18 State-led Energy-efficiency Programs Recognized as Best in US](#)

[Report Points to Brownfield Redevelopment as Source of City Revenues](#)

[Preserving Affordable Housing Near Transit: Case Studies](#)

[Chevy Volt Wins 2011 Green Car of the Year](#)

General Motors' Volt, which its makers have touted as the symbol of a leaner and greener U.S. auto industry, is designed to run on electric power for about 40 miles, at which point it relies on a gasoline engine to charge the battery.