

# FPU offers power monitors

— Mark Skinner / Floridan

New devices that will be added to Florida Public Utilities meters will let homeowner keep track of their power consumption and cost.

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An innovative new energy conservation tool called the PowerCost Monitor may help Jackson County residents reduce energy costs and counteract the rise in electric prices set for Jan. 1.

Florida Public Utilities filed a purchased power cost adjustment with the Florida Public Service Commission in September.

According to FPU officials, the end result is going to be higher electric prices for consumers, starting the first of the year. The increase is estimated at a total of 13.8 percent for residential electric service rates.

To help residents adjust to the rise of prices, FPU has recently implemented a PowerCost Monitor program.

The program was initiated as a way to allow interested residents to use the new energy conservation tool at no charge for a trial period.

FPU's Conservation Specialist Mason Brock stated in a phone interview Tuesday that FPU currently has eight monitors they plan to rotate between homes for a trial basis.

Brock explained the monitor works as an awareness tool, displaying a home's actual energy consumption.

Although, it does not lower actual usage in any way, the monitor concept is based on behavior change, in which families can see which appliances use the most electricity, Brock explained.

The monitor consists of two components. One is a sensor unit that attaches directly to a home electric meter.

This sends information wirelessly to the second component, an in-home portable monitor which displays real-time energy costs in dollars and cents.

"I conduct home energy audits frequently for FPU customers in order to assist them in finding ways to conserve," Brock said. "But with the PowerCost Monitor, users can measure how much energy they are using, even down to specific appliances."

According to a report from Blueline Innovations, the PowerCost Monitor is estimated to be compatible with 90 percent of meters in North America.

The report also states the monitors are designed for residential application; the current design is not compatible with commercial meters.

Brock explained that the monitor works by reading the home meter sensor on a continuous basis. He stated that the energy consumption data in kilowatt hours, or kwh, is uploaded about every 30 seconds and is 99 percent accurate.

"Although the monitor's accuracy range is about plus or minus one kilowatt hour, there are some other home devices which can interfere," Brock said. "Home weather stations tend to work on the same range, and can interfere with the monitor's accuracy."

Brock added he hopes to see more Jackson County residents take an interest in the monitor and take advantage of its benefits.

"I'd like to see residents take a proactive role in lowering their electric bill," Brock said. "Better than residents not making the effort, and then being disappointed with the price."

According to the Blueline Innovations Web site, the monitor can be purchased online for the retail price of \$119. However, interested local residents can try the new device for no charge through the FPU's PowerCost Monitor program.