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Shumlin announces efficiency initiative

By Neal P. Goswami, Vermont Press Bureau

MONTPELIER — The Shumlin administration unveiled a new loan program Wednesday to help make state buildings more energy efficient and reduce the state's energy costs by at least 5 percent.

Gov. Peter Shumlin announced the new revolving loan program at a press conference in Montpelier. He said his administration is working with State Treasurer Beth Pearce and lawmakers to trim as much as \$700,000 in annual energy bills from the \$14 million the state is currently spending.

The plan was crafted at the urging of the House and Senate Institutions Committees at the end of the 2013 legislative session. The proposal, included in the capital bill currently working its way through the House, is a partnership between the Buildings and General Services and Public Safety departments, the Treasurer's Office and Efficiency Vermont.

"The proposed legislation authorizes the state treasurer to invest \$8 million for state building energy efficiency through a revolving loan fund that will yield millions more in reinvestment for the same purposes in the coming years," Shumlin said. "The loan will be used to make cost-effective energy improvements ... which will be repaid and reinvested in other projects for approximately a 10-year period."

Pearce said the plan will use "residual cash" that her office would be investing anyway to fund efficiency projects within state buildings.

The loans will be used to make cost-effective energy improvements that focus on bringing older facilities up to Energy Star standards or better. Improvements could save the state between 5 and 10 percent on its energy bills, according to Pearce.

"It's an investment. It's not an appropriation. We are going to get a return on our investment and at the same time create jobs and at the same time lower our carbon footprint. I like the win-win-win situations. This is a perfect example of it," she said.

Dan Edson, an energy engineer with BGS, said state government has been including efficiency measures in all new construction. But there are older buildings scattered around the state that remain inefficient, he said.

"We needed to find a way to approach our aging infrastructure and help other agencies implement energy efficiency throughout their departments as well," he said. "This is an opportunity to invest our money, the taxpayers dollars, in projects that are going to pay for themselves over time, generate revenue and have a positive impact on the environment."

Lawmakers have embraced the idea. House Speaker Shap Smith said the Legislature spends considerable time each session "articulating goals for energy efficiency for other people." He said the program's language in the capital bill, expected on the House floor this week, will focus on the state's needs.

"The thing about this is this is no longer do what we say, it is do what we do," he said.