

'Smart' energy devices tested in homes

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The Pacific Northwest is the testing ground for new technologies that give consumers choices about how much power they want to use.

About 300 volunteers on Washington's Olympic Peninsula, in Yakima and in Gresham, Ore., will test equipment that is expected to make the power grid more reliable, while offsetting huge investments in new transmission and distribution equipment, Pacific Northwest National Laboratory said.

Approximately 200 homes will receive real-time automated price information that will adjust energy use based on price. In addition, some customers will have computer chips embedded in their dryers and water heaters that can sense when the power transmission system is under stress and automatically turn off certain functions briefly until the grid can be stabilized by power operators.

"The technologies we're testing will turn today's appliances, which are as dumb as stones with regard to the power grid, into full partners in grid operations." said Rob Pratt, GridWise program manager at PNNL in Richland, Wash.

Automated controls will adjust appliances and thermostats based on predetermined instructions from homeowners. The volunteers can choose to curtail or reduce energy use when prices are higher.

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