Microsoft launches home energy monitoring tool

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Visitors check out offerings at the stand of software giant Microsoft at the world's biggest high-tech fair, the CeBIT, in March 2009 in Hanover. US software giant Microsoft launched a free online home energy monitoring tool on Wednesday that allows consumers to gauge their usage and reduce consumption.

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Microsoft Hohm, available as a beta, or test, version in the United States at microsoft-hohm.com, lets users "better understand their energy usage, get recommendations and start saving money," Microsoft said.

"We believe technology will play a pivotal role in tackling the global energy issues we currently face," Craig Mundie, chief research and strategy officer at Microsoft, said in a statement.

"Microsoft Hohm demonstrates how a combination of advanced software and Internet-based services can help people track, understand and manage their personal energy usage," he said.

Microsoft said Microsoft Hohm uses advanced analytics licensed from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the US Department of Energy.

It said Hohm provides suggestions for energy conservation based on home energy input data and feedback contributed by users.

Savings recommendations can range from caulking windows to removing air leaks to installing a programmable thermostat, Microsoft said.

It said consumers who are customers of a Microsoft Hohm utility partner company will be able "in the near future" to automatically upload their energy usage data into the application.

Microsoft is partnering with four West Coast utility companies on Microsoft Hohm: Puget Sound Energy, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Seattle City Light and Xcel Energy.

"Microsoft Hohm will help our customers be more energy efficient by providing new insights and understanding into how they use energy and how they can conserve," said Steve Reynolds, chief executive of Puget Sound Energy.

Microsoft's launch of Hohm comes a month after Google announced that it had partnered with energy companies in six US states, Canada and India in "smart meter" software which allows consumers to monitor their home electricity usage.

The Google PowerMeter can tell residents which devices or appliances

in their homes are being electricity hogs and which are being frugal with energy.

The software program receives information from smart meters and sends a detailed report to a home computer on how the power is being divvied up.

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