

App points homeowners toward best low-energy light bulbs

October 28 2010, By Thomas Content

When it comes to buying an energy-saving light bulb, some consumers want to curb their carbon footprint. Even more want to save money.

But most light sockets in the country still use Thomas Edison technology -- the incandescent. And what consumers crave most may be convenience.

With that in mind, Milwaukee sustainability venture EcoHatchery has introduced a new smart phone app, the Light Bulb Finder.

"Part of my expectation coming in was that people, when handed a simple solution, would immediately gravitate to it," said EcoHatchery co-founder and Chief Executive Adam Borut. "And what we found is it's really critical to combine a straightforward solution with something you can do in the moment."

The new app, which made its debut on Android phones and will be available on iPhones this fall, helps guide a homeowner or renter through the process of figuring out the kind of bulb to buy and the payback the bulb will deliver on utility bills and [carbon dioxide emissions](#).

The instantaneous information provided by the app is aimed at overcoming a variety of hurdles energy advocates and researchers have found when it comes to deploying [compact fluorescent light](#), or CFL, technology.

A study last year by the Energy Center of Wisconsin found that replacing bulbs with CFLs would generate more [energy savings](#) in Wisconsin by 2012 than weatherization and a variety of other energy-saving measures. But a separate study by the PA Consulting Group found just one in five residential light sockets in Wisconsin uses a CFL bulb.

"As with a lot of energy-efficiency markets, there's a huge amount of inertia," said Steve Kihm, research director at the Energy Center of Wisconsin, which launched a campaign this fall to dispel myths about CFLs.

Barriers include the high upfront cost of buying new bulbs, as well as consumer complaints about the quality of the light and concerns about the small amount of mercury the bulbs contain, the study found.

People don't want to pay more at the store for bulbs but the economics are favorable, given that they last eight times longer and use one-fourth the energy, Kihm said.

"The energy savings are powerful, if you actually do the math, but we don't expect people to be doing math in the checkout aisle of the store," he said.

EcoHatchery was launched to provide software and services, including eco-starter kits that provide tips on [energy](#) and water use savings that can also help consumers on utility bills, said Borut, whose background is in sales and marketing.

Borut and his Los Angeles business partner, Andrea Nylund, founded the business based on a common interest in sustainability and helping people figure out how they can make a difference. Another driver, he said: seeing pollution firsthand while living in China and Taiwan.

The eco kits included a paper form that homeowners would fill out before entering their information on the EcoHatchery website to find the right bulbs and the payback information.

"As more and more [smart phones](#) have come out, they are the ideal vehicle for this. You can go through your home, stand in front of your fixtures, input the information you need, and see whether this is a bulb you want to replace."

Borut and Nylund opted to go for a free app to help generate interest. Customers have the option of e-mailing a light-bulb shopping list to themselves or buying directly from EcoHatchery.

"Hopefully some of them will purchase from us online for the convenience, or we'll be able to provide them the harder-to-find bulbs" they can't find at their local retailer.

The company's timing may be good: As the U.S. moves toward a phase-out of incandescent bulbs over the next four years, consumers will be searching for more information about new bulbs.

More information: Light Bulb Finder: www.lightbulbfinder.net

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