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Robert Sterling, City Editor 382-7294

Free energy-saving bulbs



LJ photos/Frankie Frost

GIVING AWAY: Marin Conservation Corps members will be distributing low-power consuming lightbulbs in Marin for the next two weeks. From left to right,

Lewis Hardaway, Silvia Elizondo, James Ross Jr. and Hannah Bennett put four bulbs in each plastic bag yesterday.

State giving out lightbulbs in low-income areas of county

By Richard Halstead
IJ reporter

If a stranger knocks on your door offering a free gift that will lower your electric bill, think twice before telling him to take a hike.

Marin Conservation Corps members yesterday began distributing free, energy-efficient, compact fluorescent light bulbs to low-income households in Marin. The plan is to distribute 5,000 to 8,000 of the bulbs — four each to as many as 2,000 Marin households, said Paul Cramer, a specialty coordinator with the Marin Conservation Corps.

The bulbs, valued at about \$10 each, will each save an equal amount in electricity bills over their five-year, guaranteed life-span, Cramer said.

Despite that, some people turned down the free gifts yesterday.

"Several people did refuse — that's true," said Cramer, who accompanied one of the teams distributing yesterday in San Rafael's Canal district. "One fellow said he didn't want a gift from the state of California."

Five, two-person teams will distribute the bulbs throughout the Canal, Marin City and parts of Novato over the next four weeks.

The state is supplying the bulbs and paying conservation members to make the house calls. The local bulb giveaway is part of Gov. Gray Davis' energy conservation program that calls for distributing 1.2 million of the energy-

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BRIGHT IDEA: Lewis Hardaway holds a bag containing four bulbs. One bag per household will be given away in the Canal Area, Marin City and parts of Novato during the next four weeks.

Bulbs

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saving bulbs statewide. The California Conservation Corps and similar groups throughout California are assisting.

"The idea is to encourage people to buy more of them," Cramer said.

The spike in electricity costs is a particularly intractable problem for low-income households, said Janet Miller Schoder, director of the Marin Housing Authority.

The authority, which manages the county's public housing complexes, has increased its allowance to tenants who pay their own energy costs and is footing the entire bill for higher electricity costs at Marin City properties.

"We do have a very serious problem," Schoder said. "And I don't see us getting the Department of Housing and Urban Development to absorb it." The federal government, under the new administration, is balking at providing additional money,

Schoder said.

The state, however, isn't the only one giving away free energy-saving bulbs. At the prompting of Supervisor Hal Brown, Marin County passed out 4,000 to 5,000 free compact fluorescent bulbs at last week's county fair.

"It's part of our effort to get as many people as possible to buy these bulbs," Brown said.

David O'Donoghue, manager of Lights of Rafael in San Rafael, said sales of compact fluorescent bulbs has increased since the beginning of the state's energy crisis. Before the crisis, O'Donoghue said his store sold virtually none of the screw-in type of compact bulbs that can be used to replace incandescent bulbs.

"Now we've sold 50 to 100 in just a month," O'Donoghue said. He noted, however, that the bulbs produce less light than an incandescent bulb of similar wattage, can't be used with dimmer switches and don't always fit in small fixtures.

Contact Richard Halstead via e-mail at rhalstead@marinij.com