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The Green Neighbor Challenge wants to connect America with green energy

Minneapolis, MN: Launching this Earth Day, a new nonprofit web tool aims to empower U.S. residents to drive the green energy revolution. While most voluntary green energy efforts have focused on large commercial and industrial customers, residential electricity customers still comprise the largest sector of consumption, and in sheer numbers, the greatest number of voices. Over 70% of U.S. homes, including renters, have the ability to sign up for green energy for a small additional fee through their utility (“green pricing”), but due to lack of marketing and information about these programs, very few households have enrolled. According to data from the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), only 14% of households are aware that this option exists, and only 2% have signed up. The Green Neighbor Challenge wants to change that.

Over the past 3 years, the all-volunteer team behind the Green Neighbor Challenge has been researching and building the first comprehensive nationwide database of utility green pricing program information, which includes costs, energy mix, certifications, and enrollment links. This database powers a free, easy-to-use web tool allowing users to find their local options with just a zip code. The tool also includes state energy marketplaces for customers in “retail choice” states, and, for the 27% of households who don’t have access to green energy through their utility, the option to buy Green-e certified Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) through the Bonneville Environmental Foundation.

The tool, which is currently in beta testing, can be found at greenneighborchallenge.org. The organization’s next step? Launching a nationwide social media campaign encouraging residents to switch to green energy.

The potential of green pricing programs to move the energy market has been largely abandoned due to historical under-enrollment, but the cost of solar and wind energy have fallen 89% and 70% respectively, pushing the average household cost of green pricing to under \$10/month. Enrollment efforts normally fall under the purview of utility companies, which in many states are required to offer these programs, but have little-to-no financial incentive to promote them. The Green Neighbor Challenge hopes to address this market failure on a national scale by creating a people-powered social media action campaign.

“We always say that we’re not trying to reinvent the wheel,” says Lilly Richard, the team’s research and communications lead. “We’re helping people access options that were already there, and collectively leaning on an under-utilized leverage point in the energy economy.” For the 58% of Americans who identify as “alarmed” or “concerned” about climate change, this is an action they can take to address the problem.

The project's focus isn't just on climate change, but on the immediate impacts of fossil fuel pollution on community health. Per an analysis of EPA and Department of Energy (DOE) data, if just 2% of U.S. households switched to green energy, the reduction in air pollution would generate upwards of \$983 million in public health benefits annually. It would also reduce CO2 emissions by approximately 20 million tons - or as much as taking **3.2 million cars** off the road. The Green Neighbor Challenge is currently working to test and optimize its web tool, as well as expand its network coalition ahead of an Earth Day 2022 launch. Questions and press inquiries can be directed toward team@greenneighborchallenge.org.

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