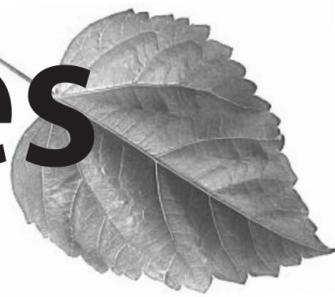


# Eco-initiatives

## State considers green tax holiday



### Bill would establish tax holiday on energy-efficient appliances

BY JESSIE GASCH  
Managing Editor

Today the Missouri Senate will vote on a proposal that could make Kirksville Sears owner Don Wheeler happy.

House Bill 2250 would establish an annual week-long tax-free holiday for consumers to buy energy-efficient appliances, which Wheeler estimates make up more than half of the sales at his Sears. Beginning in 2009, the tax-free holiday would coincide with Earth Day. Bill sponsor Rep. Mike Sutherland, R-Warrenton, said Wednesday that he is optimistic the bill will pass the Senate, where it has been "overwhelmingly supported."

Wheeler, who already has seen an increase in demand for energy-efficient washing machines, said he supports the measure as well.

"Until you've actually had [an energy-efficient appliance] and played with it and used it, ... it's all just a sales pitch, but they do what they say they're going to do," Wheeler said.

After purchasing his own high-efficiency washing machine, the water usage for Wheeler's four-child family dropped by 2,000 gallons per month, he said. He said a high-efficiency washing machine uses about 16 gallons of water per cycle, compared to the 40-gallon cycle of a standard model.

"You're going to pay more than double to get these energy-efficient appliances, so you have to kind of

weigh it out: 'Am I going to save that much electricity in the next 12, 15 years?'" Wheeler said. "The way it's going, I'd say yes."

Wheeler said House Bill 2250, deemed the Show-Me Green Sales Tax Holiday Act, probably would keep more business in-state — he said some Kirksville residents will drive to Iowa for appliance purchases because the state offers rebate incentives to customers.

"Most of the things [Sears] sells are considered kind of the bigger-ticket items, and it's amazing how many people will drive to Iowa to buy a \$3,000 lawnmower or a \$3,000 washer or dryer," Wheeler said.

Still, Wheeler said, the state, and especially utility companies, could do more to promote efficient energy usage.

"It's a nice token," he said. "... I think it's a good start, but I'd like to see the utility companies take it a little bit further because I don't think the people that [will take advantage of the tax-free holiday] are always the ones that necessarily need it."

Sutherland said he hopes the tax-free holiday will be a first step in promoting energy efficiency.

"I think once people start seeing the benefits of that, it'll just kind of snowball," he said.

Gov. Matt Blunt proposed the idea in his Jan. 15, 2008, State of the State address, in which he said consumers could save money, save energy and preserve the environment through tax-free purchases of high-efficiency appliances.

Sutherland said that in addition to the financial benefit, he hopes the tax-free holiday will bring more pragmatic attention to Earth Day.

"It also will give some relevance, in a practical way, to a larger group of people as to what Earth Day is all about," he said.

The bill would eliminate state sales tax on the first \$1,500 of a product's purchase price as long as the product has met the standards of the federal Energy Star Program. Energy Star sets the standards an appliance must meet, then certifies products that do so. For example, an Energy Star-qualified refrigerator must use 15 percent less energy than federal law requires, according to the program's Web site.

Wheeler said this cut-off between qualifying and non-qualifying appliances might skew how much a consumer actually saves by purchasing an Energy Star-qualified model.

"A refrigerator that didn't meet energy star may only operate at one more dollar a year than one that did, but [an energy-efficient refrigerator will] be \$100 more in price," he said. "It's a feel-good, ... but you've still got to keep in mind what the customer actually needs."

Sutherland said the Energy Star Program designation was chosen because of its simplicity and familiarity to appliance retailers. Mike Lodewegen, legislative director for Sen. Kevin Engler, R-Farmington, who is sponsoring a bill with a similar provision, said the tax-free holiday would start a conversation between consumers and retailers about energy use.

"They go to the store, they're going to end up talking about what energy efficiency means," Lodewegen said. "I don't think a lot of people know how much money they're going to save."

The bill would cost the state more than \$600,000 in its first year, according to a fiscal note accompanying it. Lodewegen said the loss of revenue makes the measure unappealing to some fiscal conservatives, but Sutherland said he's heard little opposition. He said he has heard concerns from some local governments,



Erin Lee Givarr/Index

Earth Week supporters Sam Pounders and Erick Tumminia play music on the Quad in conjunction with Earth Week. The annual Show-Me Green Sales Tax Holiday for energy-efficient appliances would also draw attention to the Earth celebration, says its sponsor.

who could choose to opt in or out of the tax-free holiday.

Kirksville Finance Director Laura Guy said that although the city is aware of House Bill 2250, it hasn't discussed whether it would participate.

Engler's Senate bill, which is much broader than HB 2250, was perfected in the Senate on Wednesday and includes a provision on the Show-Me Green Tax Free Holiday. Sen. Jeff Smith,

D-St. Louis, whose stand-alone bill on the holiday was incorporated into the Senate measure, said he expects the Senate to vote today on its passage.

"I think we've got to do whatever we can to stimulate the private sector into being more green, and I thought this was a very appropriate way," Smith said Wednesday. "... Today on the floor no one expressed opposition to what we did."

If either measure passes, the tax-free holiday will take place in November 2008 and in April during subsequent years. Energy-efficient appliances covered by the measure would include dishwashers, refrigerators, washers, dryers, air conditioners, furnaces, water heaters, ceiling fans, light bulbs, dehumidifiers and programmable thermostats, according to the HB 2250 summary.

# Faculty, students further renewable energy cause

BY CHRIS BONING  
Assistant News Editor

To James Harmon, professor of art history, it's time Missouri changed its attitude about energy.

He and others at the University currently are involved with a campaign to put a renewable energy standard on the state's November ballot. The standard would require Missouri utility companies to increase their use of renewable energy by the year 2020.

Harmon said he has been interested in environmental activism since he was a graduate student more than 40 years ago.

"Our country was on a very good trajectory for doing environmentally sound things and enacting good policies in the late 1960s," he said. "It looks like we're approaching the place where we were in the late 1960s again now in the early 21st century, and it's high time."

He said he got involved with the recent push for renewable energy in Missouri when PJ Wilson, the executive director of the non-profit corporation Renew Missouri, called him and asked for help.

Harmon said the initiative is important to him because of the consequenc-

es climate change will have for future generations.

"It's an urgent survival issue for them, so I'm involved because I think it's the right thing to do," he said. "I'm convinced that the Earth and all of its creatures need to be preserved and in as good shape as possible."

He has been promoting the campaign by educating others about the issue and collecting signatures for the initiative, he added.

Harmon said Missouri could play a role in the national environmental movement.

"[The state] could be another important step in the way to wiser use of energy in larger productions of energy," he said. "At the moment it seems like the responsibility for seeing that the right thing gets done is devolving to the cities and states. There's nothing wrong with states' rights, and I think that's a very healthy grassroots movement for what needs to be done."

Harmon said students are doing the

majority of signature collecting at the University, which he commended.

"The project, I believe, represents students' enlightened self-interest," he said. "So what better motivation can people have to do the right thing if it's not enlightened self-interest?"

Wilson said his group initiated the ballot measure, although the coalition Missourians for Cleaner, Cheaper Energy is responsible for campaigning.

He added that the other groups pushing for the measure include the League of Conservation Voters, Missouri Votes Conservation, the Missouri Coalition for the Environment and various chapters of the Sierra Club.

He also said that in Missouri, less than 1 percent of the energy produced is renewable.

"Without this ballot initiative, we don't really have any plans to really accelerate that number at all," Wilson said. "With this policy, we'll have 15

percent renewable by 2020."

Groups associated with the wind and solar power industries have estimated that the initiative could generate 4,100 megawatts of new wind power and 200 new megawatts of solar power, he added.

"This policy has to be in place in order for renewable energy to be taken seriously," Wilson said.

Renew Missouri hasn't publicly spread awareness about the issue of renewable energy so far, but Wilson said it has instead been networking extensively with other environmental organizations.

"It's not real until it's on the ballot," Wilson said.

Nonetheless, the group has successfully gathered enough signatures in time for the May 4 deadline, he said.

"We'll get it on the ballot," Wilson said.

Junior Hannah Hemmelgarn said she is involved with the signature-gathering process for the ballot initiative. She said she became interested in the initiative after attending a conference in St. Louis on the Cool Cities movement, which promotes energy efficiency in urban areas.

Wilson spoke at that conference and trained people to gather signatures for

the initiative. Hemmelgarn said she took the information and strategies she learned back to Truman.

"Since Kirksville is one of the cities I would like to see sign on to that Cool Cities agreement, also, it seemed like a perfect opportunity to raise awareness about it," she said.

Hemmelgarn said 86 percent of Missouri's energy comes from coal, a figure that could decrease if the state utilized its capacity for wind and solar power.

"Right now, Missouri has a more lax commitment saying, 'You can buy renewable energy, but it's not required of you,'" she said. "This would really make it so there's that pressure. It's got to happen. I mean, it's sick what we're doing to our environment."

She said she tries to gather signatures and train other people to do the same at events that focus on the environment, such as the wind energy forum last semester. Hemmelgarn added that she also tries to reach out to organizations on campus such as ECO and the Truman Sierra Club.

She said that so far she personally has gathered 150 to 200 signatures, although it's been slow going.

"We have a lot of work to do," she said.

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