

GREEN TECH THE SERIES COLUMN FOR FEBRUARY 24, 2016
HEADLINE: CA\$H IN ON THE REBATES!

The Province of Ontario announced last year that they intended to introduce a “Green Investment Fund” as a down payment as they called it, from the provinces cap and trade program. Two weeks ago, they announced that not quite one third of this fund was being made available to homes serviced by natural gas. This 100 million dollar investment from a fund with a cap of 325 million is a welcome bonus for some 37,000 customers of Enbridge and Union Gas. These gas company customers will be able to get grants to help cover part of the cost of upgrading their furnaces to a high efficiency model, pay for attic insulation and air sealing around the home. However, the effort does bare some scrutiny, since, while I have been a strong proponent of any government support in the drive to make our homes energy efficient, the number of homes that are capable of getting this grant is a small percentage of the close to four million homes in Ontario. Based upon statistics, 62% of Ontario homes are heated with natural gas or propane, which represents 2,480,000, so why are 37,000 Enbridge and Union Gas Customers getting preferential treatment? One might want to ask their MPP about the rationale behind this; I intend to. So much for equal distribution of taxpayer’s dollars to benefit all homeowners.

For the record, 28% of homes in the province are heated by electric and 3% by oil. The remaining are wood, solar or geothermal. Provincial regulations on oil heating have spelled the near demise of oil heating. According to their announcement, the government has spent 20 million of the fund on charging stations for electric vehicles. Between that and the money available to Enbridge and Union Gas customers, there is a balance in the fund of just over 200 million.

Now that we have got that clear, let’s look at the energy assistance that is available for all Ontarians. Special assistance is available for those in most need; lower income homeowners and tenants who pay their own electrical bills. The Ontario Electric Support Program was introduced recently and, based upon family income, a monthly credit on your electrical bill of up to \$50.00 is available. I ran some quick numbers and, if you have a family of four with an after tax income of \$39,000.0, you will not receive any credit; below that you are eligible for some or part of the \$50.00. If your home is electrically heated, these monthly grants can rise to \$75.00, again with the same net income limitations. This program began in January 2016 and will run for two years, based upon the information I have on hand. The LEAP program is not affected by this new program, so you will still be

able to get a one-time grant to help you keep the heat on. If you think you might qualify for this new program meant to help low income families, go to www.ontarioelectricitysupport.ca or call 1-855-831-8151 as you must apply for it in order to receive it and, so far, very few people have.

Another program the government has is called the “Heating & Cooling Incentive” program and it is available to all Ontario homeowners. This program is operated by the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO), which is the old Ontario Power Authority. This program has two incentives. The first is for Energy Star air conditioners, with the grant at \$250.00 and the new stand-alone CEE “Tier 2” central air conditioning system, in which the grant is \$400.00. On the heating side, if you purchase a high efficiency furnace with an electronically commutated motor you can receive a rebate of \$250.00. You must use a participating contractor for these upgrades, but the list of contractors is extensive. I am located outside Kingston and there are 13 HVAC contractors in this region alone on the program. For 2016, the program runs for the entire year and submissions for the incentive will, in fact, be accepted until January 8, 2017. This program does include small businesses, so if you are looking at upgrading this year, it’s worth a look.

Another coupon program has been announced and this one actually has some good coupons vs the past coupon programs. Energy Star LED lighting gets a big boost with coupons ranging from \$3 to \$8.00 for a multipack of bulbs. CFL’s are still in the energy game; they get \$3 to \$5.00 coupons. I have long been a proponent of ceiling fans for air distribution and this year you can get a quick \$10.00 for buying an Energy Star rated fan. The best coupon is the \$10 to \$30.00 coupon for baseboard programmable thermostats. We have known for some time that the older dial style thermostats are far from accurate. Four dollars for an electric hot water heater blanket is a great coupon, as every electric hot water tank should have one of these. There was one coupon I chuckled at. You can get ten bucks back when you buy a clothesline kit.

The last program in the government’s bag of energy goodies is the Peaksaver Plus program and this one, in my opinion, is a bust. There are about 190,000 Ontario homes on this program, which allows your local utility to control your air conditioner, electric water heater or in-ground pool pump. While the program is free, any energy conscious home owner already has and is using a programmable thermostat controlling the air conditioner. The number of in ground pools in Ontario is a tiny fraction of homes and with an upgraded, insulated electric water heater the savings are minimal at best. Although they will actually give you a free

in home energy display monitor, this program is a costly dud and should be scrapped, in my opinion.

I have supported energy saving programs both provincially and nationally for years. The best one was the Home Energy Savings Program where every homeowner could get an energy audit, know where to spend the money and everyone benefited. This program, sadly, was cut with little thought to its long term value.

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