

New fee on power bills to finance affordable green energy

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A new fee showing up on power bills will help secure low interest loans for those who couldn't otherwise afford to install photovoltaic systems or make other investments in clean energy.

The Green Infrastructure Fee of about \$1.30 a month begins appearing on monthly Hawaii Electric Light Co. bills. The fee will allow the state to borrow \$150 million for low-cost loans for PV systems, energy storage, advanced inverters and energy monitoring devices.

The loan program is intended to put green energy within reach of customers who can't afford upfront costs or do not qualify for other financing.

For a customer using 600 kilowatt hours a month, the green infrastructure fee will be \$1.29, but that amount will be offset by a similar reduction in the monthly Public Benefits Fund surcharge, so customers won't see much change in their total bill, according to a HELCO press release.

Hawaii is the first state to use this form of financing to help consumers pay for green energy projects, the State Energy Office said in a statement. The savings on electric bills will allow customers to repay the loans under the plan approved by the Public Utilities Commission in late September.

The money will finance the State of Hawaii Green Energy Market Securitization program, commonly known as GEMS.

Nonprofit organizations can expect to have loans become available sometime this month, said Alan Yonan Jr., communications officer with the State Energy Office. The office is a branch of the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, which will administer the program.

"A lot of nonprofits don't have that long credit history that solar finance companies or other lenders would want to deal with," Yonan said.

The process still is being developed to make loans available to homeowners and renters, who will probably be able to avail themselves of the financing early next year, Yonan said.

Hawaiian Electric and Maui Electric customers also will pay the new fees. Hawaiian Electric spokesman Peter Rosegg said the utility's role at this point is to collect the fee and turn it over to DBEDT.

The program is part of the state's push for 70 percent clean energy by 2030. Hawaii's solar capacity increased 58 percent last year to 341 megawatts, according to a study released in August by the Environment America Research & Policy Center. The study ranked Hawaii second in the nation for solar installations per capita.