

■ Using low energy light bulbs in the right places will see South Canterbury residents save at least \$100 a year on electricity under a new scheme being backed by LineTrust South Canterbury. This weekend energy consumers will get a voucher in their mailbox that lets them buy five low energy light bulbs for just \$10. The

Efficient Light Project is being trialled in South Canterbury, and if successful will be rolled out across the country next year. Reporter **Helen Pickering** looks at the benefits and why LineTrust South Canterbury decided to get behind the trial.



It seems too simplistic to be true, but according to Energy Mad director Tom Mackenzie who came up with the bright idea (excuse the pun), equipping just over half the energy consumers in New Zealand with five low energy light bulbs will stave off about two years of electricity growth in New Zealand.

In fact, if 55 per cent of New Zealand households — the equivalent of 800,000 homes — replaced the five most commonly used light bulbs in their homes with the new energy efficient Ecobulb compact fluorescent light bulb, over \$400 million would be saved in building generation plants and, at a conservative estimate, households would save \$500 over the 10,000 hour life of the bulb.

Nationwide, the saving in peak load electricity would be 270mw, about half of what Meridian Energy's Project Aqua proposal would have produced.

Just getting 13,000 of South Canterbury's 21,000 homes to each replace five high use bulbs with the Ecobulb would save 4mw of peak power, the equivalent of the energy used in either Twizel or Tekapo, or 8 per cent of that used in Timaru.

Tom and his business partner Chris Mardon came up with the bulb idea about a year ago and have been doing some thorough research since, to make sure the savings — both monetary and energy wise — were as good as they believed, and to source the best light bulb they could.

For them, their specially made Ecobulbs are the real deal — the best on the market.

"We tried light bulbs from all over the world and have sourced ours from China. They are made specifically for us and are guaranteed to provide 100 watts of light from a 100 watt bulb.

"And it only takes 20 watts of power to get the 100 watts of light.

"There have been problems in the past with some other bulbs where the output has not been as bright.

"The other thing is that an ordinary bulb uses heat and the wattage that can go in some sockets is quite low or the fitting becomes brittle and cracks. The Ecobulb doesn't use heat so you can put a much brighter light in," Tom said.

The pair were also after a good looking bulb after research showed that women in particular were put off by some bulbs on the market because they were not aesthetically pleasing.

The Ecobulb, the patented brand name of the bulbs coming to South Canterbury, is spiralled in shape and shorter than other low

energy bulbs already on the market. And is designed to fit most light fittings.

But it is where they are placed that will dictate the real savings to consumers.

"The higher the use area the more power will be saved. Some older people like to leave a light on at night so that would be a good choice. Otherwise kitchens, living areas, lounges are the best places to put them.

"And they are okay to use outside so they could be put in security lights as well."

Energy Mad carried out a survey of 50 randomly selected South Canterbury homes, both urban and rural, once it was decided the trial would get under way here, and by mid December it is hoped to know how much energy use in these places has dropped.

The trial is also to gauge consumer reaction to the bulbs, the pick-up rate, and how well the distribution method has worked.

"We believe that by using these bulbs we will be able to avoid brown-outs. This year the weather was favourable and that prevented power shortages, but at the next drought or dry spell the threat of brown-outs will be there again.

"We don't know why the Government or someone hasn't done it before. It is an easy way to save power, it is environment friendly and the beauty of it is you don't need resource consents. It's perfect."

LineTrust South Canterbury chairman Rick Ramsay said he

SAVING POWER: LineTrust South Canterbury chairman Rick Ramsay (left) and Energy Mad director Tom Mackenzie help unload the container of 65,000 energy-efficient light bulbs that arrived in Timaru just over a week ago.

could see the benefits of such a scheme the minute he heard Energy Mad outline it at a New Zealand Energy Trust conference in Wellington.

"The trust had already decided to look at doing something in energy efficiency and had put \$250,000 aside to do so at our June meeting.

"When I looked into it further, I was impressed with the research Energy Mad had done and was really amazed no one had thought about doing it before."

Tom said that small trials had been carried out in the North Island but the bulbs were much dearer and price definitely put people off.

Rick added that was why the trust had become involved. To make sure the trial would be affordable.

"We think it is a good thing for the trust to be involved in. We are the only organisation that has the charter and the finance to back an efficiency programme as large as this.

"And the savings to the beneficiaries will be more than we can pay out to them in dividends each year for a one-off cost.

"We will be still making a payout this year as normal. This expenditure does not affect that."

Rick said it had been known for a long time that energy efficient bulbs could save electricity and money, but no one had put together a national programme that could be used at a community level.

"I want to emphasise that the project is a community based one, not commercially based.

"We got Progressive Enterprises to stock the Ecobulbs — it has Four Square, New World and Pak 'n' Save stores — and we were lucky because New World is owned locally by Howard Smith who was a former chairman of the LineTrust, and he understood immediately the problems the trust was facing."

The scheme works by consumers taking the vouchers into one of the above stores, where they will be able to redeem them for five light bulbs for \$10.

Rick emphasised that the stores were not making any money out of the scheme and nor was the trust.

"We have ordered 65,000 bulbs because we estimate that about 55 per cent of local households will take part.

"Buying the bulbs will be on a first-come, first-served basis."

Tom now believes their calculations of the uptake might have been a bit light and is unsure whether the bulbs will meet demand. If they don't, it will be the middle of next year before the next shipment could arrive.

After that, if the trial is a success, the bulbs will be readily available and hopefully at the same price — \$2 a bulb.

LineTrust members Ross Carrick and Allan Andrews said being involved in the trial had been an easy decision for all trust members.

The evidence supporting the scheme was overwhelming. It would not only save peak electricity but save people money and prevent the incidence of power shortages.

They believed it was a natural thing for power trusts to be involved with and encouraged other power trusts to look at adopting the scheme.

Tom said other trusts were being approached in the hope they would back them in their area next year.

"We will have to roll it out district by district, I think, just because of the magnitude of it. But hopefully it will be throughout the country next year and we are looking for funding from the Electricity Commission and other places like that as well, to help get it up and running.

"It's just such a great scheme. We believe it will work well and we should know for certain by December."

Energy Minister Pete Hodgson has already given the scheme the thumbs up saying it was a cracker of a scheme.

He would be surprised if the light bulb scheme was not looked at long and hard by the Electricity Commission and if the South Canterbury trial proved successful, which he believed it would, that would be added incentive to get it under way nationally.

"And I can testify that the trial bulbs I was given look great in the fittings and emit a bright, clear light which is kind on the eyes."