

**Paul Ross**, AEP customer, gridSMART<sup>SM</sup> pilot participant, South Bend, Ind.

**Tell us about your interest in the gridSMART program. What are the main selling points for you? Why?**

Not sure how to answer this as a standalone question — I think this is fairly well covered in the rest of my answers!

**Tell us what it's been like to be part of the gridSMART program. How has the program performed compared to your expectations?**

I didn't really know what to expect — sometimes a change comes with such a radical shift in concepts that you need to start thinking about it from a completely different angle.

The meter has, until now, always just sat outside, displaying numbers. Suddenly, I can get hour-by-hour usage patterns, anytime I want. Power outages are recorded and responded to before I can even find a phone to report them. My meter is talking to my thermostat, and telling me how much energy I'm using, right this very second, and that was a wakeup call in itself.

It's like I've been upgraded to Grid v2.0, and we've only just scratched the surface on the possibilities.

**You've been able to lower your electricity bill by 50 percent in the summer months. How much effort did that require? Did you feel inconvenienced or were you made uncomfortable when AEP managed your thermostat?**

To be honest, it took amazingly little effort. For the first few days after the installation, monitoring my electricity usage became a kind of game — I'd be watching the meter, and then scouring the house to find out what else I could turn off. Add in a few simple schedule changes — such as moving the laundry/dishwasher to the evening — and the savings just added themselves up. I hardly had to think at all.

As far as the thermostat control, I had to actually look at the readout to be able to tell whether an event was in progress — at least twice (that I know about) I didn't notice the external control until the event was almost over. Two degrees really isn't that noticeable a change. I'd like to see a setting that allows a customer to opt-in to a three, or even four degree modification.

**Why did you choose to participate in AEP's automatic set-back program?**

Several reasons. I do consider myself to be environmentally aware, even to the point of buying my own carbon credits, so signing onto a program that helps me use less energy was a good thing on multiple levels.

Then there are the altruistic benefits — I know enough about how the grid and electricity generation works to understand what an event signifies, and why it is so important. Everyone has heard of California's rolling blackouts — no one wants to be in a similar situation. Up until now, there was no easy way to tell when demand was a problem — the only way to feel like I was helping was to make a unilateral decision to save energy, and take the risk that my "sacrifice" was completely unnecessary. Now, I know that if my community starts to use more power than is readily available, thousands, tens of thousands of my neighbors will all react together to help out. I get a warm feeling from that.



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Lastly, I love new technology, and the chance to be involved with the cutting edge of development of one of the most important systems in our lives was too enticing to pass up!

**Has gridSMART<sup>SM</sup> made you more aware of your energy consumption?**

Without a doubt. Having the real-time reporting means I can actively monitor which items in my house are the worst energy consumers, and do something about them, right there. It's one thing to watch a 30-second spot on the local news about hidden power drains, but to see for yourself that leaving a single computer running is worse than leaving every light in the house on ... that's a real eye-opener. Now I have every piece of electronics behind a UPS or power strip, and I make frequent use of the master switches.

**As someone who has been in the gridSMART<sup>SM</sup> program for several months, what additional programs do you think electric utilities should offer customers to help them control their energy usage and costs?**

I'd love to see additional notification features — for example, to have the ability to set an on-peak/off-peak warning level, and have a text message sent to a cell phone if usage rises above that level. While customers who are actively monitoring their accounts can save a huge amount while using this program, the rest of us might need a little help — at least to get started.

I'd also like to see the peak/off-peak program implemented year-round. While electricity use is obviously at a premium during the summer cooling period, having a financial incentive to pay attention the whole year would get a significant number of people more involved than they otherwise might be. Think about the recent gas price fluctuations — when gas rose to \$4 per gallon, people really thought hard about how much they needed to drive.

**You are participating in a program in which the utility helps you manage your energy consumption. How important would energy saving features, such as the ability to communicate with your meter, be for you when you purchase appliances or other devices? Would you pay a slight premium for that feature?**

Again, this is such a concept change that it opens up a whole new way of thinking. Imagine a freezer that can detect an upcoming peak period, so cycles on longer to reduce the interior temperature until it goes into "energy saving" mode during the peak hours. Appliances that refuse to run at all during peak hours, unless you push an override button. The ability to alter your thermostat from a remote location, if unexpected plans mean you won't be home for a while. Appliances that tell the meter exactly how much power they're drawing so you can get a breakdown of usage, rather than a household average.

I believe that as long as the price is reasonable, and the savings could be proven to pay for themselves over a length of time, anyone who has ever bought an energy-saving light bulb would be interested in features such as these. I know I certainly would.

**Would you like to add anything?**

Considering the explosive growth other technologies have experienced over the last few decades,

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the power distribution system has appeared to have been stuck in the Dark Age. A wealth of new advances finally seems to be changing that. Residential installations of solar panels with net metering, home-based storage batteries, using electric smart cars as storage devices ... we are moving into a world where the customer stops being a passive consumer, and becomes capable of choosing how much — or how little — they want to contribute.

And I am truly honored to be able to be a part of it.