



REBECCA OTTO
STATE AUDITOR

STATE OF MINNESOTA

OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR

SUITE 500
525 PARK STREET
SAINT PAUL, MN 55103-2139

(651) 296-2551 (Voice)
(651) 296-4755 (Fax)
state.auditor@state.mn.us (E-mail)
1-800-627-3529 (Relay Service)

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Survey for Office of the State Auditor Best Practices Review: How has your city reduced energy costs?

By Rebecca Otto, Minnesota State Auditor

In June 2007 in Duluth, I had the pleasure to host two “City-State Conversation” roundtable discussions at the League of Minnesota Cities Annual Conference. The discussions covered such topics as employee recognition programs, good internal controls, administrative fines, and memberships to chambers of commerce for local government officials. The discussions also included the new Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) standard that deals with other post-employment benefits (OPEB).

Both of my roundtable sessions were well-attended. I could not help but notice that there were two other roundtables that were also very well-attended: one on energy and climate change, and the other on green communities.

Afterward, I was approached by several local officials who had been at these roundtables. Their request was a simple one: “Can your office develop a report that assists local government officials in trying to reduce energy costs?” They wanted all of the good information that is out there to be put together, and focused at the local government level.

They were beginning to feel public pressure to make changes and were finding it difficult to determine which services and technologies are good sound investments, and which ones are not. For example, one gentleman asked, “Is it a good idea to let your squad cars idle? Or is it more energy efficient to shut them off?”

On the drive back from Duluth, I thought about how our office could accommodate this request. The Office of the State Auditor (OSA) is responsible for conducting Best Practices Reviews of local government practices in Minnesota. I realized reducing energy costs in local government would be a very appropriate topic because the goal of a Best Practices Review is to help local governments reduce costs. This review could help local governments reduce operating costs by helping them reduce energy costs.

The Topic Selection Advisory Committee for the OSA's Best Practices Reviews met last fall. After some discussion, we decided that our Best Practices Review topic will be Reducing Energy Costs in Local Government.

To gather information for this Best Practices Review, we will be surveying local governments. You should receive information on how to complete the survey sometime within the next two weeks. If you do not receive the survey, please contact Julie Wroblewski, OSA, at (651) 297-3681 or Julie.Wroblewski@state.mn.us.

We are aware that many good energy-efficiency projects have been implemented by local governments in Minnesota. We also know of entities that would like to embark on energy-efficiency projects, but they need information and the benefit of the experience of others to make sure they are making informed decisions.

We look forward to collecting your responses. I would like to thank you in advance for your participation in the survey, and I look forward to sharing the review with you.