

chaired the Resources Committee when Birnbaum worked there, in an email to Platts described her as “enormously talented and committed to energy and natural resources policy.” He added. “She’ll be a breath of fresh air at MMS.”

Salazar’s appointment of Birnbaum leaves only one energy-related post unfilled in the upper echelons of Interior: director of the Office of Surface Mining.

The White House has made nominations for two other key positions — former Interior Inspector General Wilma Lewis as assistant secretary for land and minerals management and former Bureau of Land Management official Robert Abbey as director of BLM. Lewis and Abbey are awaiting Senate hearings.

— *Bill Loveless*

---

## NATIONAL LABORATORIES

---

### Microsoft uses Lawrence Berkeley code to help homeowners track energy use

Microsoft believes its new free software that allows electricity customers to monitor use and compare prices will not lead to loss of privacy or a misuse of data — concerns that could affect utilities that might want to partner with the company.

After two years of development, Microsoft on Wednesday announced Hohm, a free online application that company officials said had thousands of electricity consumers discussing the product on web sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The software uses analytics developed by the Energy Department and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Microsoft said.

The product will compete with Google’s previously announced Powermeter product, a similar home energy monitoring tool. But Google Policy Counsel Harry Wingo said Thursday it is “great” that electricity consumers will have access to more smart-grid technology.

“Smart grid is really an energy internet,” Wingo said.

Google has also said it does not want access to personal data such as home addresses and is committed to customer privacy. Google said their product will also help utilities integrate renewable resources, reduce energy use and create savings for customers.

Microsoft has already partnered with Puget Sound Energy, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, Seattle City Light, and Xcel Energy on Hohm, which allows users to go online, enter information about their electricity usage, compare it to average prices in their area, and get energy efficiency recommendations.

Microsoft said in a statement that a license with Lawrence Berkeley for computer code used in the new product “is an example of the power of publicly financed energy research being harnessed by the private sector to develop entirely new applications and markets.”

The Home Energy Saver™ calculator is designed to help consumers identify the best ways to save energy in their homes, and find the resources to make the savings happen. The

Home Energy Saver™ calculator was the first Internet-based tool for calculating energy use in residential buildings. About 1,000,000 people visit the HES site each year, more than 90% of whom are homeowners and renters. The Home Energy Saver™ calculator quickly computes a home’s energy use online based on methods developed at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Users can estimate how much energy and money can be saved and how much emissions can be reduced by implementing energy-efficiency improvements.

Company representatives said Hohm will help utilities meet regulatory requirements by promoting conservation and improving communication with customers. The product is not available yet, but the company is signing up consumers at the [www.microsoft/hohm.com](http://www.microsoft/hohm.com) web site to receive more information as the product is unveiled in the next couple of weeks.

Microsoft Product Unit Manager Troy Batterberry, in an interview, said the company already has gained extensive experience as a trustee of sensitive data while developing the Healthvault application, which allows users to upload medical information and exchange it with doctors and health care providers.

“We really learned from going through that process,” said Batterberry, who added that Hohm will give users “active control at a personal level.” The software is a simple tool that will enable conservation, promote zero carbon electricity sources, and reduce demand, he said.

Eventually the software will enable an aggregation of demand response from residential users similar to what is already being done with large industrial customers, he said, depending on the desires of the customer.

He acknowledged that the software will give Microsoft access to massive amounts of data and build profiles of individual customers, but he said the company does not want access to home addresses, phone numbers or utility account numbers. Consumers will maintain control over data, although the company will gain revenue through marketing of electricity products on the web site, he said.

On the web site, consumers can select the level of information they want to give, and can answer up to 200 questions about their homes and electricity usage, such as what kind of windows they have and how many. The software will also activate a data chain through the generation, transmission, distribution, and end-user sectors, Batterberry said.

Utility company executives learned of Hohm at the Edison Electric Institute’s Annual Conference in San Francisco, California, but some raised concerns about customer privacy.

“I am very concerned about people wading around in my customer data,” said Tony Earley, chairman and CEO of DTE Energy, which is planning a large advanced metering infrastructure investment. “The security issues really have to be addressed.” Cybersecurity will need to be locked down before his company gives too much access to data, he said.

Microsoft cites a May 2009 Gartner study that found 80% of electricity consumers would participate in an energy efficiency program if offered by providers. Cost reduction is the key motivator for participation in such a program, the company said.

— *Jason Fordney*