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Wednesday, June 24, 2009 As of 11:13 AM EDT

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# Microsoft Unveils Energy-Use Software

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By **CASSANDRA SWEET**

Microsoft Corp. said it plans to launch new Internet software to help consumers gauge how much electricity they use and figure out how to cut back.

The Redmond, Wash., software company will initially partner with four utilities, including **Xcel Energy Inc.** of Minneapolis and Puget Energy Inc. unit Puget Sound Energy of Bellevue, Wash., to provide those utilities' residential customers who opt into the program detailed usage information.

Other U.S. consumers can use the program to estimate the energy efficiency-- r inefficiency-- of their homes and appliances, particularly heaters, air conditioners and lighting, Microsoft said. To make those estimates the company will use historical weather and usage data obtained from the U.S. Department of Energy and the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, said Troy Batterberry, product unit manager for energy management and home automation at Microsoft.

Several states have passed laws requiring utilities to cut their customers' energy use over concerns about the environment and escalating costs associated with building new generation and transmission facilities.

Pending federal legislation would require utilities nationwide to conserve energy, and President Barack Obama has made energy conservation a priority of his administration. Utilities have embraced smart meters as a way to cut energy use, in hopes that customers will use the information to change their behavior.

Utilities also have an eye toward eventually charging customers for the power they use based on the wholesale market price at the time the power is used, with the help of advanced utility meters that convey usage information in real time.

"We believe technology will play a pivotal role in tackling the global energy issues we currently face," Craig Mundie, chief research and strategy officer at Microsoft, said in a statement. "Microsoft Hohm demonstrates how a combination of advanced software and Internet-based services can help people track, understand and manage their personal energy usage."

In addition to providing energy usage information, Microsoft's application, called Hohm and scheduled to be launched within the next week, will estimate the carbon dioxide emissions associated with the electricity customers use, based on the mix of generation sources that serve their area, Mr. Batterberry said in an interview. The carbon calculation can also be applied to a customer's natural gas, fuel oil or liquid propane use, he said.

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"The goal is to help consumers save on their energy bills," he said.

While anyone will be able to use the software to estimate their usage, customers who have advanced utility meters and whose utilities sign up to use the system will get much more accurate and useful information from the program, Mr. Batterberry said.

The service will be free for consumers and utilities aside from the cost of providing Microsoft with customer usage data, he said.

Microsoft's announcement about its Hohm application comes a little more than a month after rival Google Inc. unveiled a similar Internet application, called PowerMeter, that reads information coming from a smart meter, and displays it in real-time on a Web site. Google is testing its software with utilities including Edison International utility Southern California Edison.

Although utilities are still in the early stages of installing smart meters, competition to provide the interface that displays the energy-use information could heat up over the next several years, particularly if utilities switch to rates based on real-time wholesale market prices.

Two municipal utilities, Seattle City Light and Sacramento Municipal Utility District, also have signed up to use Microsoft's Hohm software, and the company is in talks with half a dozen other utilities about joining, Batterberry said.

Write to Cassandra Sweet at [cassandra.sweet@dowjones.com](mailto:cassandra.sweet@dowjones.com)

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