

Local Government Case Study:  
*City of La Mesa*

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### **Background**

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- Location: San Diego County
- Population: 34,000
- Size: 9 square miles
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### **Summary**

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In response to Gov. Gray Davis' mandate, the City of La Mesa formed an Energy Conservation Committee to develop energy-saving measures and projects. La Mesa became the first city to change traffic lights to green light-emitting diodes (LEDs). Traffic signals accounted for roughly 30 percent of La Mesa's total electricity consumption, and the city expected an estimated 50 percent cost savings. Other projects developed by the La Mesa Energy Conservation Program included mandating higher temperatures in city facilities, creating a "dark hour" in city buildings from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. and forming a partnership with San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) to provide educational and informational materials to city residents.

Referenced in Local Government Guides:

- #1, "Reduce Energy Use in Local Government Facilities Through Conservation Measures"
- #2, "Reduce Energy Use in Local Government Facilities Through Efficiency Improvements"

### **Plan**

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The city manager administered an energy audit of City Hall and other public facilities and recommended retrofitting lights and HVAC systems in several buildings. Staff augmented the audit report by recommending replacement of old refrigerators with ENERGY STAR®-labeled products. To design the programs, La Mesa formed an Energy Conservation Committee. The committee developed energy-saving measures and projects, which were approved by the city council on June 5, 2001. The targets were: lighting

infrastructure; public facilities with heating/cooling systems; and residential energy consumers

### **Programs: Conservation**

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- ✓ **Lighting:** Removed unnecessary bulbs in all offices.
- ✓ **Office Equipment:** Turned off computers during lunch hours and long meeting.
- ✓ **Employees:** Implemented casual clothing policy. Employees were very receptive and proactive in the implementation.
- ✓ **Dark Hour:** Instituted a cost-free program known as the "dark hour." City buildings, mainly City Hall, shut down all power (lighting, heating, office appliances) between 12 and 1 p.m. The program was communicated to employees via memo and was based on the honor system. No one administered or oversaw the operation.

### **Programs: Efficiency**

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- ✓ **HVAC:** Found that due to the age of the HVAC systems in City Hall and other public facilities, it was not economical to retrofit. La Mesa planned to replace the entire systems and has budgeted \$150,000 for the replacement.
- ✓ **Lighting:** Retrofitted lighting in city facilities, at a cost of \$20,000.
- ✓ **Street lighting:** The Public Works Commission retrofitted red lights in June 2000 and green lights in June 2001. LED bulbs enabled the city to install battery backups at high priority intersections/traffic lights, so that lights would not be interrupted in event of a power outage. The city expected to receive a grant to install battery backups at all the signalized intersections. LED lighting upgrades cost approximately \$100,000.
- ✓ **Refrigerators:** Replaced all old refrigerators in city facilities with ENERGY STAR® brands.

### **Programs: Public Outreach**

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- ✓ **Brochures:** Distributed more than 15,000 Flex Your Power Residential Energy Conservation and Safety brochures at public meetings, Little League, Hall meetings, libraries and senior citizen centers.

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## **Results**

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The city involved employees from all the departments and made them responsible for implementing energy-saving measures. La Mesa estimated 50 percent cost savings from red and green LEDs and calculated savings from lights retrofit at 36,000 kWh.

## **Lessons Learned**

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La Mesa learned that every watt counts. Though some of the measures the city took were immeasurable or resulted in insignificant savings, the city's action showed the community that they were working together to reduce energy. Actions taken by city personnel were critical to the success of the city's program.