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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

FOR THE STATE ENERGY CONSERVATION PROGRAM

AGENCY: Department of Energy

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE) has prepared a Programmatic Environmental Assessment (PEA), DOE/EA 1068, to assess the environmental impacts associated with the State Energy Conservation Program (SECP). DOE previously funded SECP projects under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act of 1975 (EPCA). The State Energy Efficiency Programs Improvements Act of 1990 (SEEPIA) and the Energy Policy Act of 1992 (EPACT) amended EPCA to broaden the range of state initiatives qualifying for Federal assistance under the SECP.

The PEA presents a general analysis of the potential environmental effects associated with broad types of projects that can be funded under the SECP. It does not analyze specific environmental effects or alternatives associated with individual energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy projects. Individual actions are to be evaluated in detail on a project-by-project basis to determine whether their impacts fall within the bounding analysis of the impacts analyzed in the SECP PEA.

Based on the analysis provided in the PEA, DOE has determined that the proposed action (providing SECP grants to states, as authorized under the EPCA, SEEPIA, and EPACT when

such projects' impacts fall within the bounding analysis in the PEA) does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA). Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and the Department is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact. Projects which are consistent with the goals of the EPCA, SEEPIA, EPACT, but whose impacts are not within the bounding analysis of the PEA would require further NEPA documentation, which may tier from the PEA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Copies of the PEA and information on the SECP are available from:

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Information on DOE NEPA review procedures is available from:

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PROPOSED ACTION: The proposed action is for DOE to provide SECP grants to states for energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects as mandated under the EPCA, SEEPIA, and EPACT. The purpose of the SECP is to promote energy conservation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency at the state level by providing Federal technical and financial assistance in developing and implementing comprehensive state energy conservation plans and programs. The broad categories of energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy initiatives qualifying for funding include: transportation efficiency initiatives; energy audits, feasibility studies, evaluations, and planning; investment in industrial and commercial energy efficiency; public education; and residential and commercial building efficiency programs. DOE grants would be used by states, organizations, and individuals undertaking a variety of projects falling within these categories.

Unlike other grant programs where individual projects are funded separately, annual funding of the State Energy Conservation Program (SECP) is determined by a formula contained in 10 CFR Part 420 subject to the availability of funds. A state need only show DOE how its share of the annual funding would be spent through the submission of an annual state plan describing its energy conservation and efficiency programs/projects. The state plan must cover all mandatory program activities and those optional program activities the state proposes to undertake. Should any part of the annual plan be found not to comply with the goals and objectives of the SECP, the plan is returned to the state with comments for revision. DOE does not approve or disapprove individual projects within the plan.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: Analysis of the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed action is limited to a general discussion of the conservation initiatives which may be employed by grant recipients in working toward the SECP goals. Conservation initiatives funded by these programs are intended to increase the efficiency of energy consuming devices and to decrease energy consumption in the United States. To assess the environmental impacts, SECP programs qualifying for Federal technical and financial assistance have been divided into the following broad categories.

Transportation Efficiency: Qualifying programs in this category may include initiatives such as advanced technology demonstrations, conversion of street lights to more energy-efficient technologies, public education on right turns at red lights, incentives to encourage van pooling or use of mass transportation, alternative fuel use demonstration, and improved management of fleet vehicles. Transportation efficiency programs would result not only in energy savings but also in decreased fatalities, injuries, and loss of property from accidents while improving the flow of traffic, and the lowering of carbon monoxide, ozone, nitrogen oxides, and hydrogen sulfide emissions. The increase in vehicle emissions from increased use of public transportation is expected to be much lower than the emissions from automobiles replaced by public transportation.

Energy Audits, Feasibility Studies, Evaluations, and Planning Programs: Programs included in this initiative category promote energy audits, evaluation, and planning designed to increase productivity, energy conservation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. Technical assistance

may be provided through audit assistance programs that provide on-site assessments of possible energy-saving measures. Long-term planning programs to evaluate and manage energy use in particular areas could also be funded under this category. Although programs within this category will not impact the environment directly, changes resulting from their implementation will eliminate procedures and processes that are ineffective. No adverse impacts on the environment have been identified; indirect benefits would consist of better air and water quality, energy savings, and waste reduction.

Investment in Industrial and Commercial Energy Efficiency: Projects under this initiative category help businesses identify technically sound, cost-effective energy measures and create an economic environment conducive to investing in energy efficiency. This may involve offering incentives, such as financial assistance, or removing such barriers to action as lack of information or unfamiliarity with products and technology. Projects would lead to reduction in the use of energy resources, fossil fuels in particular. This would result in reduced air emissions, which in turn would lead to better air quality. Reduced power demand would improve water quality due to reduced waste water discharge. No adverse environmental impacts have been identified.

Public Education: Under this initiative category, funding would be provided to train teachers and to introduce and improve school and on-the-job training curricula dealing with energy efficiency issues. The impact from increased demand of paper products is insignificant compared to the offsetting influence of positive environmental impacts expected to result from educational programs.

Residential and Commercial Building Efficiency: This initiative category includes programs for weatherization, improving construction practices and standards, using more efficient technologies, increasing renewable energy use, and promoting consumer awareness. These projects would result in decreased need for space heating and a decreased demand for electricity. No adverse environmental impacts have been identified.

The SECP initiatives, consisting of both mandatory and optional elements as discussed in the PEA, would be undertaken in pursuit of a common goal -- a measurable decrease in the consumption of energy in the United States, or a measurable increase in the efficient use of energy. Those initiatives intended to reduce energy production and consumption also are intended to improve environmental conditions, reduce the need for waste disposal, lessen air and water quality impacts, reduce the need for exploration and development of land, reduce potential human impacts on endangered and threatened species, and reduce the possibility that archeological/historical resources will be disturbed.

Projects funded with SECP grants must fall into one of the categories listed previously and have as a goal reduction in energy consumption or an increase in energy efficiency. Furthermore, the SECP program supports only those projects which already have demonstrated positive results in these areas. Based on these SECP Program requirements, it is expected that the impacts of the majority of projects would fall within the boundaries of the impacts analyzed in the PEA. If a particular project has any distinctive characteristics that would create the potential to significantly affect the environment, then an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement,

would be prepared, tiering from the PEA as appropriate. All potential impacts, including any potential for disproportionately high and adverse impacts on minority and low-income populations, would be evaluated.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION: The only alternative to the proposed action considered in the PEA was the No Action alternative. DOE's funding of SECP initiatives is authorized by Congress under provisions of the EPCA, SEEPIA, and EPACT. DOE's only discretion is in deciding whether state plans for which grant applications are submitted meet the criteria of the SECP Program.

Under the No Action alternative, DOE would not fund energy conservation, renewable energy, and energy efficiency programs. Funding for SECP initiatives under the original EPCA would expire, and states would be unable to acquire SECP funds. However, DOE is authorized to fund the SECP as expanded by enactment of the SEEPIA in 1990 and the EPACT in 1992 when such funds are appropriated by Congress. As a result, the No Action alternative would not accomplish the goals of these Federally mandated programs to reduce energy consumption or increase energy efficiency. While under the No Action alternative some projects might be undertaken in the absence of SECP funding with private sector or state funding, they would likely be implemented at a slower pace and with less consistency than under the SECP Program.

No other alternative actions to the proposed action are identified. As with the No Action alternative, any alternative action would be inconsistent with the EPCA, SEEPIA, and EPACT, by

which DOE is authorized to fund SECP projects. DOE's only discretion is in deciding whether projects for which grant applications are submitted fall within the program definition when funds are made available by Congress.

DETERMINATION: Based on the analysis presented in the PEA, DOE has determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and DOE is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

Issued at Washington, DC, this 6th day of June, 1996.

Christine A. Ervin
Assistant Secretary
Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy