

IIT, U. of I., Oak Park to give electric 'smart grid' a spin

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Two universities and the Village of Oak Park will serve as testing grounds for the future of electricity conservation -- a "smart grid" that will use digital technology to tell people how much electricity they are slurping.

The goal is to have "smart" washers, dryers, dishwashers and other appliances figure out when to use energy at the most efficient time so people save money on their electric bills and keep from overtaxing the electric grid.

The initiative is starting with \$30 million in state stimulus and renewable-energy money. Members are seeking another \$30 million in federal stimulus money to push the Chicago area into the smarter electric age.

The Illinois Institute of Technology, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Oak Park will play key roles: IIT will test technology and digitally-enabled products to make sure they can run smoothly on the smart grid; the U. of I. will test that the technologies used on the smart grid are secure from hackers, and Oak Park will host local leaders in a workshop Oct. 7 to talk about helping their constituents save energy in the most innovative ways.

Oak Park Village Manager Thomas Barwin has spearheaded a separate program in which ComEd will blanket the village with "smart" electric meters this fall to give residents more detail about their use of energy, with the goal of conserving electricity and cutting power bills.

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