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Utilities implement demand-side management programs to help customers save energy. Energy efficiency programs, by far the largest demand-side management effort, offer customers incentives to increase efficiency and, therefore, decrease overall electricity demand. Demand response programs, another type of demand-side management, are implemented to decrease customer demand during times of very high system demand or emergencies.

Demand-side management programs aim to lower electricity demand, which in turn avoids the cost of building new generators and transmission lines, saves customers money, and lowers pollution from electric generators. Utilities often implement these programs to comply with state government policies.

EIA's annual survey of electric utilities, the Annual Electric Power Industry Report (EIA-861), tracks the incremental annual electricity savings and costs from utility-run energy efficiency programs. Incremental energy savings are the additional energy savings from new participants in energy efficiency programs during the current reporting year.

The amount of incremental energy saved through energy efficiency programs increased from 26.5 million megawatthours in 2014 to 29.9 million megawatthours in 2017. At the same time, incremental spending on energy efficiency programs has remained essentially flat in recent years. Utilities spent about the same in 2017 as they did in 2014 (\$5.9 billion), after spending had increased to \$6.2 billion in 2016.

Utility spending on new energy efficiency programs is mostly focused on residential and commercial customers. Over half of utilities' incremental spending on energy efficiency programs was spent on customer incentives. Examples of these incentives include free or low cost energy audits and assessments of homes and businesses, free or discounted energy-efficient lightbulbs, and rebates to customers who purchase energy-efficient or ENERGY STAR-certified major appliances such as refrigerators, freezers, hot water heaters, and air-conditioning equipment.

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