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Energy Center of Wisconsin Wins MEEA Education Award for Innovative Online Rich Media Training

Chicago – Energy Center of Wisconsin’s use of rich media – a powerful combination of video, PowerPoint and interactive tools such as online polls and live Q&A – to connect participants to its popular continuing education programs has earned the 2011 Inspiring Efficiency Education Award from the Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA).

The Energy Center’s new approach breaks through traditional training barriers such as cost, time and travel constraints to deliver quality training to continuing education participants from around the world at substantially lower costs.

Additionally, Energy Center of Wisconsin is the only entity in the energy efficiency arena offering online education as a live event in streaming rich media format.

The Center, which already had a reputation with its member utilities for high-quality classroom training, began offering online distance learning in 2007. After trying various approaches to online training – including self-guided courses, text-heavy webinars, and pre-recorded classroom events – the Energy Center knew it had sparked something when it offered its first live rich media program.

In March 2009, the Energy Center selected a popular topic – Daylighting, or the practice of using natural light during daylight hours to provide energy efficient internal lighting – as its first live rich media offering. The event drew an astounding 1,048 registrations within one hour, and a total of 1,503 participants – an unprecedented turnout for single Energy Center online course.

“Our classroom offering of Daylighting training could reach only 30 people,” said Energy Center of Wisconsin External Affairs Manager Annemarie Newman. “Not only is live rich media training more cost-effective and convenient for our members, but it’s allowed us to reach a global audience.”

The award was accepted by Andrea Minniear Cherney, Energy Center of Wisconsin’s Senior Project Manager, at MEEA’s annual Midwest Energy Solutions Conference, www.meeaconference.org, on January 13 in Chicago.

According to Newman, the Energy Center is also able to offer online live rich media education at roughly 5 percent of the cost of classroom training.

Building on its success, the Energy Center developed an executive level series of online training events featuring high-level policy analysis and research overviews and targeted to utility executives, legislators and other energy decision makers. The series was called an unparalleled success, reaching 2,500 people in 48 states.

The total number of online views of Energy Center University's existing on-demand calendar stood at 688 for 2008. After adding live rich media events in 2009, however, the Center's total number of views increased to 11,000.

The live rich media training has proven to be a great resource for the many organizations operating on reduced budgets, and also makes for a greener program by eliminating the need to travel.

According to Newman, the carbon emissions for travel are reduced to zero from 1.55 tons, based on an average of 105 round-trip miles driven per classroom attendee.

"Energy Center of Wisconsin's innovative training program raises the bar for the industry," said Jay Wrobel, MEEA's Acting Executive Director. "MEEA is proud to recognize their efforts with this year's Inspiring Efficiency Education Award."

Bestowed annually, MEEA's Education Award is presented to the organization that has developed and implemented a local campaign, program, strategy or idea to increase knowledge and action on energy efficiency in the Midwest.

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Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, www.meeaconference.org, is a collaborative network advancing energy efficiency in the Midwest to support sustainable economic development and environmental preservation.

MEEA promotes the market transformation of energy efficiency technologies, processes and best practices within a 13-state area, through policy advocacy, program design and facilitation and piloting of energy technologies. MEEA bridges the gap between policy adoption and program implementation.