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REC technology coming to town

Homes' energy use controlled via Internet

By **Melanie Hennessey**
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

You're at work on a hot summer day when suddenly, the temperature starts to cool off. You remember that the air conditioner in your home is going full tilt and wish you could somehow adjust its settings and save money.

Soon, some Milton residents will have the ability to do just that — control everything from the air conditioner to the thermostat in their homes even when they're not there.

How? With new Bell Canada Residential Energy Conservation (REC) technology — which will soon be offered through a 250-home pilot in Milton — that allows a person to control the energy use at their house over the Internet.

"This creates more opportunities for customers to save and use their energy more wisely," said Milton Hydro president Don Thorne. "This technology is really a 'smart home' thing."

The system works through an Internet device called a gateway, which is installed in the home and then communicates with items in the house that have been connected wirelessly. This can include the thermostat,

lamps, a dryer, and even the electricity meter to give the user a real-time reading on their hydro consumption.

"You know what's going on in your house, even though you're not there," Thorne noted. "It's a very sophisticated and hopefully helpful tool for customers. You can respond in real time to real conditions."

In addition to residents being able to log onto the Internet and adjust settings in their home, the new technology also allows them to pre-program information for certain scenarios.

For example, a person could arrange through pre-programming to have equipment in their home turned off if electricity prices go beyond a certain point.

"It gives customers the ability to respond under all conditions," he said.

Those who don't have time for that kind of thing can also relinquish the control of their system to a third party that, for example, could be Milton Hydro.

The pilot project is expected to start shortly and run for about six months. It will likely take place in the new area of town, since those homes already have smart meters, which track how much energy a home uses

and when.

The technology will also soon be available for residents to try out in Mattamy Homes' two model green homes, located in the subdivision south of Derry Road and west of Thompson Road.

Other Miltonians will have a chance to do their part and save energy through initiatives the Ontario Power Authority is looking to introduce in communities across the province, such as the residential load control program.

Thorne said it would be similar to Toronto Hydro's Peaksaver program, where an item in a person's home like an air conditioner is connected to a third party through a wireless device.

In times of peak demand, the air conditioner would be turned off for short periods, in turn preventing situations like the 2003 blackout that left much of southern Ontario in darkness. Those who take part in the program would receive \$25.

The residential load control program and other OPA initiatives are expected to be offered in Milton by this summer.

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