



Smart Switch article

Saving – and making the most of – energy saver switches

Another way PeakRewardsSM is helping the environment is by making sure we get the most out of energy saver switches installed under the legacy energy saver switch program, which has been in place since the late 80's. BGE started recycling energy saver switches in 2008 as they have replaced them with new, more efficient Smart Switches as part of the PeakRewardsSM program. A BGE demand response field technician initiated the switch recycling program and even won a 2008 BGE Environmental Achievement Award for his efforts. Thousands of switches are being recycled every year and their components reused. Keith Wesselman, BGE's Lead Environmental Scientist and chair of BGE's recycling team, tells how the program got its start, how it operates and what it does to help the environment and reduce BGE's carbon footprint.

Q: What are the switches made out of and how are they recycled?

A: Each switch contains a circuit board, plastic housing, various wiring, and a metal box, which is mostly steel. BGE considered a few recycling options before making its final decision. Options included reusing the switches, recycling them whole and recycling the component pieces. Currently, the switches are packed and picked up by [Always Recycling LLC](#) [based in Havre de Grace], which removes the copper wires, and recycles them. From there, the rest of the components go to another local recycling service, where the remaining components are sold.

Q: How many switches has BGE recycled so far, and how many are expected to be recycled?

A: Last year, BGE collected about 26,560 switches, which comes out to about 33 tons (66,497 pounds). This year, BGE expects to collect and recycle about twice as many units: more than 50,000. All of them were being discarded and sent to landfills before that. The plan is to recycle nearly 200,000 more switches over the next two years.

Q: How does the switch recycling program help the environment and fit in with BGE's other environmental stewardship efforts?

A: Recycling energy saver switches preserves landfill space in an age where space demands are greater. In addition, recycled items decrease the need to use raw materials. Every day across BGE, we interact with literally every aspect of our environment. That's why preserving, nurturing and protecting our natural resources has been a long-standing commitment in all that we do. Click here for more information on BGE's [environmental stewardship](#).

Q: Does recycling the switches reduce greenhouse gases, and if so, by how much?

A: Last year, the energy saver switch* recycling program saved approximately 67 metric tons of CO₂ in 2008 (or the equivalent of removing 12 cars from the road each year).

Q: What other items does BGE recycle?

A: BGE recycles various items, including office supplies, rubber and plastics, metals, electrical equipment, electronics and miscellaneous solids and liquids. In the future, we plan to recycle the lights and ballast inside old fluorescent lighting fixtures whenever they are removed from businesses to be replaced by new energy efficient lighting. We also have a program which recycles mercury thermostats removed from customers' homes through the PeakRewardsSM program. We do not want the mercury contained in the thermostats to end up in landfills, where it's a health, safety and environmental hazard, so the most prudent thing is to recycle them.

[For more information on PeakRewardsSM, click here.](#)

*Assumes 50% steel, 30% plastic, 10% copper and 10% electronics.