

syracuse.com

Syracuse University gets \$2.5M in stimulus money to educate utility workers in smart grid technology

By Tim Knauss / The Post-Standard

April 09, 2010, 9:09PM

Syracuse, NY -- Syracuse University this week received a federal stimulus grant of \$2.5 million to develop "smart grid" college programs for utility workers and engineers, and National Grid received nearly \$2.2 million to train its own employees in smart grid technology.

The grants were part of \$100 million in funds awarded by the U.S. Department of Energy for 54 training projects around the country to educate new and existing workers for the next generation of utility networks.

So-called smart grids use sophisticated meters and other equipment to deliver precise information to customers and utilities, enabling customers to exert more control over their usage and utilities to better monitor their networks. Money for the grants was authorized under the federal recovery act of 2009.

Syracuse University will work with a consortium of colleges in Central and Western New York to establish courses on cyber-security, power system load analysis, monitoring diagnostics and other subjects related to smart-grid engineering and policy, said Laura Steinberg, dean of SU's L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science.

Programs will be developed for students at community colleges and in undergraduate and graduate programs, Steinberg said.

Other institutions working on the project and offering courses are Onondaga Community College, Clarkson University, University of Rochester, Buffalo State College and the University at Buffalo. National Grid is collaborating with the schools.

OCC plans to offer a smart grid associate's degree geared toward utility jobs. Other colleges will add smart grid concentrations to their engineering programs, said project leader Chilukuri Mohan, chair of SU's department of electrical engineering and computer science.

National Grid's grant will be used for in-house training of up to 4,900 of its employees — 2,200 workers in New York state and the rest in Massachusetts, said Courtney Quatrino, speaking for the utility. A wide swath of the work force will be trained, from customer service representatives to line workers and engineers.

"Our customer service reps need to go through the training so they understand how to explain the technology to customers," Quatrino said.

National Grid asked state regulators in January for permission to spend about \$123 million on a pilot project to develop a smart grid in the Syracuse area that would be paid for with a surcharge on utility bills. The Public Service Commission has not acted on the request.

National Grid also is waiting for regulatory approval of a smart grid project in Massachusetts. "We're optimistic," Quatrino said. "We believe that smart grid is the future."

Contact Tim Knauss at tknauss@syracuse.com or 470-3023.

© 2010 syracuse.com. All rights reserved.