

Hankook Ilbo

Mileage accumulated by saving power at home to be used to support socially vulnerable groups

[The era of the energy prosumer]

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**Donation as the primary incentive for reducing electricity and gas use
Expansion of participatory system in which many citizens come together in a single united effort**

**Seoul Energy Welfare Platform Project
Support provided for 3,337 households in form of insulation boards, solar panels, etc.**

**Chung Hee-jong, who has participated in volunteer home repair projects for six years
“The most satisfying moment is when people tell me that their lives have improved.”**



The development of a grassroots energy welfare system, through which the profits gained from the energy conservation efforts of citizens are donated to those who cannot afford electricity, is gaining momentum. Here, an elderly couple watches a team of civic activists making repairs to their home in Yeongdeungpo-gu to make it more energy efficient. (Source: Seoul City)

To office worker Lee Sun-seong (43), saving energy has become second nature ever since he applied to become a member of Eco Mileage, a citizen-participatory energy-saving program. Lee always

unplugs home appliances or lights that are not being used and purchases only electronic appliances that have high energy-efficiency grades—even though they may be more expensive. Through such seemingly simple acts, Lee managed to reduce his use of gas, electricity, and heating by over 10 percent compared to the previous year. The KRW 100,000 in “Eco Mileage” that he received as an incentive was donated by Lee to be used for the energy poor. Lee said, “I am very happy to not only save energy but also be able to give back to the community with the click of a mouse.”

With the responsibility for implementing energy policies shifting from district governments to citizens, a grassroots energy welfare system is beginning to take shape. The Fukushima Taiichi nuclear disaster has initiated a global trend in which nations are reducing their dependence on nuclear power. The autonomous districts of Seoul, for example, have sought to expand the reach of their energy policies by deciding to make citizens the primary agent, which has led the public sector and civil society to come together and form a new energy welfare system.

The most notable example is the Seoul Energy Welfare Platform. Affiliated with the One Less Nuclear Power Plant project and implemented by Seoul Metropolitan Government, this project aims to donate the profits gained through the production or conservation of energy by ordinary citizens to those who have been alienated from energy welfare benefits.

Participation in this donation project is open to all citizens. Donations include not only monetary gifts but also heated mattresses and used lamps, in addition to Eco Mileage.

From last July until last month, a total of KRW 693.85 million was donated through the energy welfare platform (3,211 individual donations and 43 corporate donations). This included the donation of KRW 26.62 million worth of incentives by 1,480 Eco Mileage members to the Energy Welfare Fund.

The donations are used to assist the energy poor (those who spend at least 10 percent of their monthly income on energy, including energy for heating and cooling). So far, insulation boards have been installed, lighting changed to LED lights, boilers replaced with high-efficiency units, and mini solar panels installed for a total of 3,337 households.

A spokesperson for Seoul City said, “By saving energy to create a donation fund, we are killing two birds with one stone. It helps improve the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions while also providing benefits to the donors in the process of transferring the donated funds to the energy poor, who make up 10 percent of the entire population of Seoul. Under the city’s clearly defined energy welfare policy, cooperation among the public sector, corporations, and civic society maximizes the synergy effect created.”

The projects to improve household energy efficiency and provide funding for home insulation are also highly active. Although home repair projects in the past were focused on maintenance, recent efforts have focused more on increasing energy efficiency by installing high-efficiency boilers, wind barriers, insulation boards, and/or mini solar panels. Chung Hee-jong (46), who has helped conduct home repairs once or twice a month for six years, said, “Whenever I go out to work on someone’s home, I always find that they pay much higher energy fees than the average household, because their home’s energy efficiency level is so low. The most satisfying moment for me is when people who have been alienated from government aid say that their quality of life has improved as a result of our home repair work.”

The basic philosophy of energy welfare, which is based on citizen participation, will spread throughout Seoul by being linked with the local welfare services of autonomous districts (e.g. Community Service Center on Wheels). Director Moon Young-rok of Seoul City’s Social Housing Support Center said, “To solve the problem of energy poverty, which is actually a complicated issue that involves multiple factors, such as low income levels, blind spots in the welfare system, and consumption levels that are inadequate in meeting everyday needs, we must come up with a strategy that combines diverse types of support. Furthermore, we have to enhance the link between welfare with administrative services,

expand infrastructure, and encourage the participation of citizens and corporations in order to promote a better general understanding of and participation in the solution to energy poverty within our communities.”

By Sohn Hyo-sook



Civic activists install a solar panel on a rooftop. (Source: Seoul City)