

News and Commentary

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Maine's public interest groups: The Industrial Energy Consumers' Group

[Editor's note: The actors in public policy include not only elected and appointed public officials, but also the public interest groups that promote various agendas. To help understand the perspectives of some of these groups, MPR plans to profile one of Maine's public interest groups in each issue.]

The Industrial Energy Consumers' Group (IECG) has been one of the most active participants in electric regulation policy in Maine. The IECG has eight members, all of whom use relatively large amounts of electricity in their operations. These members include paper companies, such as Boise Cascade and Champion and manufacturers like Forster. Although IECG is best known for its participation in electric utility policy, its interests also spread to other energy issues. IECG has in the past hosted public conferences on Maine's energy policy.

The membership of IECG does not include all major industrial users in Maine. Non-member industrial firms in Maine, such as Bath Iron Works and Madison Paper, also participate directly on a regular basis in electrical proceedings in Maine. Nor does the membership of IECG have a single homogeneous set of self-interests. Some members of IECG are co-generators that sell as well as buy electric power. These co-generators generally benefited from Maine's favorable co-generation policies in the 1980s. Other members of IECG have benefited from various types of demand-side management incentives. Firms that neither co-generate nor benefit significantly from demand-side management would pay higher rates to finance those activities. These sometimes divergent interests propel an agenda that seems *ad hoc* at times.

While the IECG consistently espouses policies for lower industrial rates, its positions on some rate design issues have not been entirely predictable. For example, the IECG advocated expansion of the electric lifeline program for low-income customers, even though industrial customers would bear part of that cost. Its position seemed to be that it is preferable to factor equity considerations into electric rates via a targeted program rather than through general rate structures. Unlike some regulatory intervenors, its positions frequently seem to calculate not only its short-run regulatory interests, but also its longer run political interests.

IECG is represented by Preti, Flaherty, Pachios and Beliveau. Anthony Buxton, who formerly served as Democratic state chair, serves as executive director. Joseph Donahue, a lawyer who once served as general counsel at the Public Utilities Commission, and Mark LeDuc also represent IECG. The president of IECG is Glenn Poole of Champion International. The visibility of IECG's representation contributes to its prominence in electric utility policy.

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