Postings: from the desk of Jim Brodrick

On Monday, I had the pleasure of announcing the official launch of the Municipal Solid-State Street Lighting Consortium, formed by DOE to leverage the efforts of the many cities that are pursuing evaluations of LED street lighting products. The launch took place in Seattle, the home base of Seattle City Light, which DOE has selected to lead this new national effort. Seattle City Light has long been a leader in energy efficiency and environmental stewardship, and their recent experiences evaluating LED products through pilot projects will resonate with many cities in many regions.

With Edward Smalley of Seattle City Light and me at the launch were Ed Ebrahimian, Director of the Bureau of Street Lighting for the City of Los Angeles, and Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn, who have signed on as the Consortium's first members. Cities, power providers, energy efficiency organizations, and others who invest in street and area lighting are invited to join them and share their experiences. To become a member, simply fill out the application form on the Consortium website.

The Consortium will provide a forum to enable better-informed decisions about LED street lighting purchases. The goal is to build a library of field experience and data that will speed up the learning process for buying and implementing high-quality, energy-efficient LED street lights. By joining, even the smallest municipalities can tap into a large body of knowledge and experience that will maximize the value of their dollars spent evaluating LED street lighting. Our hope is that sharing information will allow members to avoid repeating lessons that have already been learned by others.

Membership in the Consortium is open to municipalities, utilities, and energy efficiency organizations, with participation at various levels from other interested parties. Primary members include municipalities, power providers, building owners, and others who invest in street and area lighting. Advisory members are solicited from organizations with a known history of promoting lighting quality and power efficiency. Guests, including manufacturers and consultants, may be invited to present information on selected topics at Consortium meetings, and will have a chance to review draft specifications and other materials prior to their issuance.

The Consortium, whose efforts are funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), will not only collect, analyze, and share technical information and experiences related to LED street and area lighting demonstrations, but will also provide a consistent resource for evaluating new products. It will work through national and regional meetings, webcasts, web-based discussion forums, and other means. The first Consortium webcast will be held on May 6, and is open to all interested parties. To register or for more information, visit the DOE event page.

This is a pivotal time for LED street lighting. Cities all across the country – from Seattle, to New York, to Anchorage, to Pittsburgh – are giving it a careful look, with an eye toward replacing their existing street lighting with SSL, in many cases using ARRA Block Grant Funding. Why? To cut their energy use, reduce their carbon footprint, and lower their operating costs. With more than 34 million street lights in use across the country, DOE estimates that use of LED technology for street lighting has the potential to save communities more than $750 million a year in energy costs alone, thanks to solid-state lighting's energy efficiency and directionality. The potential for maintenance savings is also substantial, because well-designed LED street lights are likely to last longer than their conventional counterparts – and replacing street lights can be a complicated, labor-intensive, and costly procedure.

But there's also good reason to be cautious. Not all LED lighting products are created equal. Some are better than others, sometimes by a wide margin, and more than a few don't live up to their manufacturers' claims. Also, LED technology is completely different from conventional lighting technologies, with its own unique considerations. The learning curve for SSL is considerable, and field experience is limited.

That's why we've launched the street lighting Consortium – to collect and share information, best practices, and lessons learned related to LED street lighting demonstrations. I expect we'll see many more members, very soon.

Today, I'm in San Jose, California, for DOE's second annual Solid-State Lighting Manufacturing R&D Workshop. I'll share what I learn here with you next week.

As always, if you have questions or comments, you can reach me at postings@lightingfacts.com.

James R. Brodrick