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For immediate release:
July 20, 2009

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Building Codes Division proposes rule for quick approval of small wind turbines

(Salem) — In its continuing effort to be flexible with the onset of new technology and advance sustainability, the Department of Consumer and Business Services, Building Codes Division (BCD), in conjunction with its Electrical and Elevator Board and the Oregon Department of Energy, has proposed a rule that would allow manufacturers to install small wind turbines quickly, yet safely. The rule provides a streamlined process of certification for small wind turbines as an alternative to the lengthy national certification process.

Oregon law requires electrical equipment be certified before it is installed in the state. However, national certification for small wind turbines is new and can be lengthy and expensive for manufacturers. The standards require either that the product be listed by a national testing laboratory or every turbine be evaluated by a field evaluation firm.

BCD's proposed rule would allow manufacturers to submit a single wind turbine for extensive field evaluation and then provide documentation that all other turbines of that particular model are the same as the evaluated one. They then could begin installing the evaluated model of turbines and also start the standard national certification process.

"This proposed rule would fast-track the process for small wind turbines, helping Oregon continue to tap into alternative sources of energy," said Patrick Allen, acting administrator of the Building Codes Division.

According to the American Wind Energy Association, at a site with wind speeds averaging 12 miles per hour, a 10-kW wind turbine can generate about 10,000 kWh annually, or about enough to power a typical American household. The length of the payback period depends on the turbine, the quality of wind at the installation site, the prevailing cost of traditional electricity, and available financing and incentives.

The division expects the rule will become effective July 27 and remain valid until Jan. 1, 2011. The rule would apply for wind turbines with a capacity of 100 kilowatts or less. BCD will hold a public hearing Tuesday, July 21, starting at 9:30 a.m. in Conference Room A at its office, 1535 Edgewater St. NW in Salem. Written comments may be submitted before 5 p.m. Friday, July 24, to aeron.teverbaugh@state.or.us.

The proposed rule is the most recent step in the Building Codes Division's efforts to promote green building and sustainability. Other initiatives include adding new energy efficiency provisions to the residential building code, setting statewide standards for designing and installing electric vehicle charging stations, and providing more online services to building contractors.

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