

**Consumers to test high-tech electric meters**  
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**Several electricity companies announced Thursday that they are preparing to sign up customers for a pilot project that will test high-tech meters.**

**TXU Energy, Reliant and Direct Energy will sign up around 1,000 customers in Dallas and Houston for the program, offering goodies in exchange for the right to shut off certain household appliances automatically using the new meters.**

**The project is designed to test whether the meters can help consumers cut their electricity use. Power companies would shut off appliances that use a lot of electricity during the peak demand hours of the day, in the afternoon.**

**The shut-offs would take place on random days and are designed to cycle the appliances off in a way that some consumers might not even notice, rather than to simply to cut juice to the house.**

**In return, customers would get energy-efficiency upgrades or bonus payments, as well as an electricity monitor to show in real time how much power the household is using.**

**"The expectation is that it's primarily reducing the peak load," said Milton Holloway, chief operating officer for the Center for the Commercialization of Electric Technologies, an industry-funded group that is organizing the pilot.**

**By reducing peak demand, Texas could reduce the need for more power plants and allow older, inefficient plants to retire.**

**Oncor, a unit of Energy Future Holdings, and Centerpoint are installing the new meters in Dallas and Houston.**

**The pilot will last two years, but retailers plan to focus the test on hot days next summer, when demand for electricity peaks.**