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Local firm's energy tool gets boost from Games

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Vancouver's Olympic athletes village is the first customer for a locally designed household electricity monitor called PowerTab.

The device was born out of a class at the University of B.C. that links engineering students and their ideas with business students and their marketing expertise.

PowerTab measures the amount of electricity a household is using and calculates how much that power costs.

The concept behind PowerTab is that people will willingly conserve electricity if they are aware of how much they're using, according to company spokesman Colin McKerracher.

Millennium Water, the housing project on southeast False Creek that will serve as the athletes village for Vancouver's Olympics, has included PowerTab on the specification sheet for its 1,300 units.

While an official contract is still in the works, McKerracher said it will be a big step for their little start-up company, called Energy Aware Technology Inc.

"The nod from Millennium Water is what will give us the traction and commercial validation to raise [our] next round of financing," McKerracher said.

Energy Aware is looking to raise \$500,000 to \$750,000, which McKerracher said would be enough to get PowerTab into commercial production and provide some working capital.

The firm raised \$500,000 to develop and build prototypes of their monitor.

Roger Bayley, Millennium Water's design manager with the firm Merrick Architecture, said PowerTab was one of about four electricity monitors that were evaluated as part of a larger effort to measure five areas of energy and water use in the project.

"It's catchy," Bayley said of the PowerTab device, having a user-friendliness that appealed to the developers.

PowerTab consists of a sensor at a home's electricity panel that measures electricity coming in and sends a signal along the home's circuit wires.

The second component is a wireless transmitter that plugs into a household socket to read the signal and send it to a display that can be anywhere in the house.

McKerracher said they tried to give PowerTab family appeal with indicator lights that flash green when electricity use is below a programmed budget level or red when power consumption edges over budget.

He added that Energy Aware will sell PowerTabs, which should sell for between \$200 and \$250, on its own website and is now in discussions with other online retailers.

In the meantime, McKerracher said the company hopes to attract the interest of property developers and builders who are in a position to put in large orders.

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