

Charles Percy Award for Public Service Nomination - Jeff Harris, Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance

“One of the most innovative thinkers on energy efficiency in the U.S.” >> “One of the top five people in the country that has serious command of all aspects of energy efficiency – the technical, political and economic.” >>“Had a hand in guiding all that the Northwest has achieved in energy efficiency.”

These are just a few of the ways that colleagues have summed up Jeff Harris’ career contributions to energy efficiency. For more than 25 years, Jeff has been at the forefront of the Northwest’s energy efficiency work, influencing the way homes are built, products are manufactured, buildings are maintained and industries operate. His contributions and influence have extended from one end of the market transformation spectrum to the other, from bringing emerging technologies to market, to designing energy efficiency programs and evaluation methods, to driving upgrades to codes and standards.

Jeff began his career in 1982 as a conservation engineer with Bonneville Power Administration where he worked on new technologies, codes and voluntary programs for new homes. In 1989, he joined the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (NWPPCC) and it was here that Jeff had some of his greatest influence on energy codes. In the 1980s, surveys showed that energy code compliance was dismal; they were simply too complicated to understand and enforce. In the early 90s, Jeff became the “voice for common sense codes”, working to simplify Washington State’s commercial energy code while increasing its stringency by 10 percent. This led to a 20 percent increase in compliance over a four-year period. It was a landmark code upgrade as builders could now understand how to meet it and code officials could enforce it. Leveraging this experience, Jeff began work with the Oregon Department of Energy on crafting and reformatting the language for the state’s residential energy code. As in Washington, the simplified, more efficient code was adopted and compliance soared.

In addition to locking in regional energy savings through code changes, Jeff was also a leading advocate for building operation efficiency and commissioning – a new concept in the early 90s. Jeff helped found the Northwest Commercial Collaborative, which put on the region’s first building commissioning conferences. The conferences attracted a lot of attention and led the organization to expand to become the national Building Commissioning Association that exists today. Years later, Jeff helped found the New Buildings Institute (NBI), and continues to serve on the Board. Described as a “small nonprofit with a big mission,” NBI supports emerging technologies and improved codes and standards for commercial buildings. The strategies and language that Jeff used to help craft Washington’s commercial code in 1994 were repurposed by NBI to recommend commercial code changes to the International Code Council (ICC). Previously, ICC was focused on residential building, but after adopting NBI’s recommendations, it became a complete code solution.

While at NWPPCC, Jeff helped author the Third and Fourth Power Plans for the region. The latter called for the creation of the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA), a nonprofit organization dedicated to market transformation activities that could not be done with utility budgets alone. “On loan” from the NWPPCC, Jeff helped NEEA get off the ground in 1996. He joined NEEA full-time in 2001, managing its unsolicited proposal process, whereby companies could propose a project or technology for NEEA to fund. Jeff’s role was to review proposals, conduct due diligence on their savings potential, “sell in” the ideas to the Board, and then help implement and evaluate the impacts. Jeff’s technical background, coupled with his optimism and communication skills made him the perfect person for this job. Out of this process, many projects have gone on to become pervasive market technologies, offering long-term savings for business and industry. Some examples:

- **BacGen Technologies:** Reduces energy consumption for wastewater treatment facilities by up to 50 percent. More than 70 Northwest communities have implemented this approach.
- **Variable frequency drives (VFDs):** Enables evaporator fan motors at food storage facilities to run at slower speeds when appropriate, such as in cooler months. Reduce energy use by 61 to 86 percent. They’re now an industry standard.
- **80 PLUS:** Energy-efficient computer and server power supplies that are now incorporated into national ENERGY STAR specs, with the potential to save the Northwest 8.5 million kilowatt-hours of electricity annually.

While NEEA had success in funding many of these projects, Jeff also realized early on that NEEA would need to evolve to be more strategic in how it intervened in markets. In 2001, Jeff helped the organization adopt the commercial building initiative with a cohesive marketing strategy for promoting high performance buildings across vertical markets such as grocery and real estate. He then helped form the residential initiative in 2003 and industrial initiative in 2004.

Jeff also led the concept development for making ‘Business Practice Change’ a focus of NEEA’s activities. He spearheaded the idea that offering rebates wasn’t the only way to improve energy efficiency. Instead, utilities could help customers save more energy by changing the way they view, use and manage energy at a fundamental level. He drove this idea into NEEA’s work with the commercial and industrial sectors, shaping how NEEA approaches projects today.

Jeff now works as NEEA’s Director of Emerging Technologies and has had his hand in countless other energy efficiency success stories over the years, many of which have resulted in national efforts. Described by his peers as a “bridge-builder”, “a positive force”, a “lynchpin”, and the “glass-half-full guy”, Jeff has spent most of his career as the underdog, selling in energy efficiency when few were willing to listen. When you talk to Jeff, he is quick to tell you that he was not the only one working on these projects. But in talking to his colleagues it’s clear that they would never have succeeded without him.