

CTEnergyInfo.com

Content Preparation Guidelines

September 2008

Introduction

CTEnergyInfo.com aims to be a comprehensive resource on wise energy use for Connecticut residents and businesses. And the site needs to be accessible and easy to navigate so visitors can find the information they need quickly, without having to wade through layers of menus and pages.

The new site framework and navigation scheme are designed to organize content on the site so that visitors from a broad range of audiences – from residential consumers to business owners and community leaders – can locate relevant information quickly and easily, so they can take action to use their energy more wisely.

These guidelines are intended to help staff at DPUC determine when and how to add content to CTEnergyInfo.com, so that it will be useful and readily accessible for all audiences. Because the site is an informational resource, these guidelines are an important tool to use as content is being developed. The goal is to update the site as needed with revised and additional information, while preserving as much of the site structure and ease of navigation.

Identifying suitable content for the site

When considering content for inclusion on CTEnergyInfo.com, ask the following questions, in order, to determine whether or not the information belongs on the site. If the answer to each question is “Yes,” proceed to the next step, “Determining where content belongs within the site”.

If you arrive at a “No” answer, chances are good the information, no matter how useful or interesting, probably doesn’t belong on CTEnergyInfo.com.

- 1.) Is the information *relevant* to Connecticut residents or companies?
- 2.) Is the *main focus* of the information wise use of energy, including electricity, oil, natural gas, gasoline, and other fuels?
- 3.) Is the information *practical*? Does it give the reader information they can use, or refer them to resources that will help them take action?

Theoretical background information may be relevant and helpful in certain sections of the site, but every entry (except the Glossary) should include a “call to action” or point to steps the reader can take to take control of their energy and use it wisely.

- 4.) Is the information not currently on the site? Check for existing entries that link to the resource in question. If any already exist, try editing their descriptions as needed to reflect any overlooked significance/audience, rather than creating an additional entry.

Content Tips:

Avoid using jargon. Never assume the audience knows all the acronyms. Page and section titles should be descriptive of their content in the plainest language possible.

Be consistent with naming. Be careful that the way you refer to pages does not change depending on which section you are in. Inconsistent naming can cause confusion and doubt in users making them unsure if they have previously viewed a particular page.

Content presentation

Page Headline: Each page requires a title that reflects its contents.

Typically this will be easily derived from the menu entries that lead to the page. For instance, the “Understand Your Bills” page in the site’s “Residential Resources” section might have a headline such as “Understand Home Energy Bills”.

Page Intro: Each content page should contain a brief introductory paragraph that explains its relevance and the organizing principle used to group the resources found on the page.

The paragraph should consist of 2 to 4 short sentences, focusing on what’s found on the page and emphasizing how it enables visitors to take action in order to use energy more wisely.

Resource Entries: Resources entry should contain the following elements:

- 1.) **Heading (with hyperlink):** The heading for each resource should be a “title” -- it need not be a full sentence – and should name the resource in question. The hyperlink to the resource should be applied to the Heading (i.e. the URL of the resource need not be given in full.)
 - If the resource is the *homepage* of a website, typically the Heading will be the name of the site or its sponsor organization (e.g. “United Illuminating”).
 - If the resource is a *page located inside a website*, the Heading should reflect the focus of that specific page (e.g. “Your United Illuminating Residential Bill”)
- 2.) **Description:** One or two sentences describing the contents of the resource and its relevance.
 - Avoid the passive voice (“*Information will be found here...*”)
 - Instead, use the active voice (“*You will find information here...*”) or the imperative voice (“*Go here to find information...*”).
 - Emphasize the result, or “payoff” of taking the steps advised or explained by the target resource (e.g. “*Lower your bills...*”, “*Earn a tax credit...*”).

Sample Page

The following is a suggestion for how to structure a page and one resource entry.

This example is the Help Paying Energy Bills page, found in the Residential Resources section of CTEnergyInfo.com.

The sample resource, which is definitely not the only one that should appear on the page (and probably not the first one that should appear there, either), points to a list of member agencies in the Connecticut Association For Community Action (CAFCA) network (URL: <http://www.cafca.org/members.htm>), where homeowners can apply for the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program.

Assistance with your home energy bills

If you and your family need are having difficulty paying your energy bills, help is available here in Connecticut.

The state Energy Assistance Program has a variety of programs sponsored by private utility companies, and a variety of private community organizations that can offer help.

Resources

[Connecticut Association For Community Action \(CAFCA\) agencies](#)

Organizations in this list can help homeowners apply for the state Energy Assistance Program. Find the group that serves your city or town, and call or email for more information.

Organization of Resource Entries on a page

Resource lists should be arranged *in order of relevance* to the site section and page upon which they appear.

The first resource listed on a given page should be the one most broadly applicable to the audience for that page, and subsequent resources should be listed in order of decreasing relevance.

For instance, the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program, the best “first stop” for residential customers seeking help paying fuel bills, should be the first resource listed on the Residential Programs section’s Help Paying Energy Bills page. The Connecticut Association for Community Action (CAFCA) might be listed next, because its member agencies can help qualifying families apply for the Energy Assistance Program, and so on.

Resource subheadings

On pages with long resources lists (more than five entries), bold subheadings may be used to separate relevant subsections of the list. In that case, Resources within each subsection should also be ranked in order of most- to- least relevant for the subsection.

It’s possible that links to a particular organization or resource may appear more than once in a subsection Resources list, if that resource is applicable to the audiences for each particular subsection.

For instance, the CT Green Building Council (CTGBC) is relevant to both the Commercial and Educational subsections of the Resources list on the Business Programs page.

In these cases, adjust the Resource description to explain the Resource’s relevance for the subsection audience and, whenever possible, link to pages within the target site that apply specifically to each particular audience.

If all entries within a Resources list or subsection are deemed equivalent in terms of relevance to the audience, they may be listed alphabetically for convenience.

Make sure all external links open in a new window, let your visitors close your site down when they are finished with it, don't pre-empt their intentions.

Modifying site menus

The CTEnergyInfo.com site structure was designed carefully to balance ease of navigation with comprehensive content. It was also designed with “room to grow,” with content sections broad enough to cover the types of content that are likely to become available in the foreseeable future.

Nevertheless, it is likely, if not inevitable, that the site’s menu structure and organization will have to expand at some point, to accommodate new information.

As that occurs, content managers should do their best to avoid adding new sections to the primary site structure. Unless the site’s mission changes radically, it’s hard to envision relevant information that won’t fall under one of the seven existing main sections – Residential Resources, Business Resources, Community Resources, Energy Assistance, Ways to Save Energy, Clean Energy, and Green Construction.

Additions to the site structure should fall within these existing content sections, and each will require the creation of a new page and corresponding entry in the navigation menu.

Entries within site sections should be handled much like Resource entries on a page. New pages, and their corresponding menu entries, should be placed in *order of relevance*.

If, for instance, geothermal energy becomes a significant factor in Connecticut, it should be given its own page and menu entry in the Clean Energy section of the site, and its ranking within the menu structure should reflect its importance relative to the other entries – e.g. it might come after the more-significant PV Solar Systems and before less significant Wind Energy systems.

Keep navigation text short. The idea is that users should be able to quickly scan down the list of pages available and identify the one most likely to have content they need.

Less is more - try to limit the number of navigation and sub navigation items. When possible, try to stay between six and eight choices. Anything more than this and the audience may quickly become overwhelmed and struggle to process the options available.

Keep the position of the navigation consistent.

Link maintenance

Links on CTEnergyInfo.com should be checked monthly to make sure the pages they point to are still active and relevant.

The chief goal of link maintenance is to ensure that links don't "point to nowhere" and generate useless error messages. But it's not enough to check that each link simply works; content on the target page must be checked to make sure it still matches the Resource description at CTEnergyInfo.com. Owners of external sites may occasionally move content to new pages, and links at CTEnergyInfo.com should be updated accordingly.

The DPUC staff responsible for link maintenance establish contacts at the major sites that serve as Resources on CTEnergyInfo.com (such as UI, CL&P, and CTCleanEnergyOptions), and arrange to receive advance warning when major changes are planned for those sites.

Because big changes to those target sites could affect multiple links across CTEnergyInfo.com, it's wise to be able to anticipate them and prepare to update CTEnergyInfo.com at the same time changes are made to the target.

On what we hope will be rare occasion, pages, and even entire sites, linked from CTEnergyInfo.com will simply go away. In these cases, it's appropriate to remove the Resource(s) from CTEnergyInfo.com. Before doing so, however, do a Google search to see if another site offers similar information (relevant, as always, to Connecticut residents). If an alternate site exists, change the Resource link URL and adjust the Heading and Description as needed.