

The Shumlin administration on Monday launched its Comprehensive Energy Plan website (www.vtenergyplan.vermont.gov) that the administration said will serve as a one-stop source of information related to the state's energy plan.

The Department of Public Service is taking the lead on the 20-year energy plan, collaborating with other state agencies, stakeholders and the public. The deadline for completion is Oct. 15.

"The active participation of Vermonters is essential in determining our energy needs and preferences moving forward," Gov. Peter Shumlin said in a statement. "Using this one-stop format to receive information from the public and keep Vermonters involved will help us identify and implement solutions to meeting our energy needs."

The state's energy plan was last updated and adopted in 1998.

Elizabeth Miller, commissioner of the Department of Public Service, said Monday that along with stakeholder meetings and public forums, the website represents another vehicle for public outreach.

"We've been accepting comments all along both in traditional written form and by email," Miller said, "but it's such a web-based society now that having a way for folks to easily send thoughts and comments through a web-based form just made a lot of sense to us."

Miller said as the state proceeds with its new energy plan, it is critical to seek stakeholder and public input up front.

She said Vermonters have expressed a desire for "local energy solutions and the other is a continued eye on the regional competitiveness, keeping us competitive regionally, which means looking at affordability."

Among the stakeholders in the process are the state's utilities.

A spokesman for Central Vermont Public Service Corp., the state's largest electric utility, said the update to the state's energy plan is "incredibly timely."

"Not only are we entering a new phase of power supply in the electricity world in the next year, with the end of the old HQ (Hydro-Quebec) contract and VY's

(Vermont Yankee's) license expiration," spokesman Steve Costello said. "But there are all kinds of new technologies that we think should be examined closely. As the commissioner has suggested, we think the plan should take a holistic look at electricity, transportation fuels and heating fuels, to see what roles each can play, and it appears that may be an important part of the state's plan."

Miller said Vermonters need to keep in mind that plan is comprehensive, which means electric rates, home heating oil or gasoline cost should not viewed as isolated issues.

She said one example is the use of electric heat pumps.

"If folks were to switch to an electric heat pump, obviously they would be using more kilowatts and have a higher electric bill potentially," Miller said. "But they'd be trading that cost for the cost of the fuel oil or the other source of home heating they had used previously."