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AUDREY WHELAN: Consumer Advocate Dennis Brown is raising concern about the possible electrical shortage. Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro says there are more efficient ways to heat homes than using electric baseboard heaters. However Spokesperson Dawn Dalley says the cheap installation costs make electric heat more attractive. She speaks with Carla but first Consumer Advocate Dennis Browne.

DENNIS BROWNE: Baseboard electric radiation is not a very efficient form of heat. Experts say that up to 30 percent is lost through exterior walls. Between 1990 and 2000 it increased by 1.8 percent but between 1999 and 2000 in a one year period it increased by 7 percent and it continues to rise by an average of more than 3 percent each year. And we don't have the hydrology to keep it moving. So where are we going to get the electricity? We can only be relying more on Holyrood which is a very expensive form of electricity. The average per capita consumption in 1970 was . . .most people used 9,000 kilowatts annually. That's risen now to 22,000 kilowatts annually.

CARLA FOOTE: So what's the problem with the baseboard heaters?

DENNIS BROWNE: The baseboard heaters . . .it is not a very efficient form of heat, experts will tell you. And a lot of the heat is lost through the exterior walls, people say up to thirty percent or more could be lost through the exterior walls. And there's better forms of heat you can have out there, even better forms of electric heat like Convectair which I put in my home after I found out about it. That's an oil coil that's heated by electricity and that will bring down your bill by a third and it's a better form and more efficient form of heat.

CARLA FOOTE: But I would think, I mean I know at least most of the new homes in the metro area have baseboard heaters, why are people using them so often if you know it's not as efficient as other forms?

DENNIS BROWNE: Well this all has to do with Newfoundland Power's profit

margin. People at the Public Utilities Board, the experts from Hydro will tell you there's a real problem with the expansion in baseboard electric radiation in this Province. And it's on account of their profit margin.

CARLA FOOTE: So most people that aren't using electric baseboard heaters are using oil heat, how does that compare?

DENNIS BROWNE: Well oil heat is something that should be advocated as well because in this Province 30 percent of our electricity is generated by oil fire bunker C at the Holyrood generating station. Why are we burning oil to produce electricity? Isn't it far better if people burned their own oil and had their own furnaces in their own homes because really we're using two forms of energy to get heat. We're using the oil at Holyrood to produce electricity to give us heat. Whereas if people burned their own oil in their own homes by having their own furnace that in itself is an efficiency.

CARLA FOOTE: So do you think that we're facing or we will be facing pretty soon an energy shortage if we keep using electric baseboard heaters and other inefficient forms?

DENNIS BROWNE: We don't have a major plan here in place for hydrology generally in the Province and we don't have a major plan for conservation. Right now the Public Utilities Board should be instructing both Newfoundland Power and Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro to commence a good conservation program and to . . .one that will see people bring down their energy usage in their homes. What we need are objectives and each utility should be . . .have its own objectives to bring down energy usage among consumers and the consumers with whom they deal.

CARLA FOOTE: Consumer Advocate Dennis Brown is saying that baseboard heaters are costing too much money, their rate of consumption is going up 3 percent every year and that Hydro . . .Newfoundland Power and Hydro should be recommending that people not use them. What do you see the problem is with them?

DAWN DALLEY: Well certainly I mean there's a couple of points and electric baseboard heaters as most people are probably aware of . . .space heating is one of the major consumers I guess of electricity in the home. And baseboard heating is how most people, most new home starts anyway, that's how they're heating their home. So if you look at on an annual kilowatt hour consumption basis, homes with electric heating consume between 25,000 and 35,000 kilowatt hours annually versus 10,000 to 12,000 kilowatt hours annually without electric heat. So it certainly is a tremendous consumer of electricity.

CARLA FOOTE: What else would be more efficient other than baseboard heaters, are there other forms?

DAWN DALLEY: Well there's different ways that people can certainly space heat their home. I mean there's options like oil heating for example. And in Newfoundland, now in a lot of places you probably wouldn't recommend oil heat to someone because you think about the environmental aspect of it. In Newfoundland 40 percent of our electricity is generated by our Holyrood thermal generation facility which burns oil of course to provide electric heat. Our efficiency in Holyrood is about 40 percent whereas an oil furnace in someone's home is about 80 percent. So it's much more efficient from a heating perspective to heat with an oil furnace than it is with the . . .with the electric space heating.

CARLA FOOTE: But I guess as you mentioned environmental concerns would be one of the reasons why people might use baseboard heaters?

DAWN DALLEY: Certainly and the initial cost actually . . .when you're building a new home the cost of installing baseboard heating is much, much less than installing an oil furnace.

CARLA FOOTE: But I guess over the long term would you end up saving money with an oil furnace?

DAWN DALLEY: I think you know depending again, depending on the rates for electricity if you were to . . .and the rates for oil which of course vary. So it's you know it's certainly difficult to say but what we do know is that you know an oil furnace in a home is certainly more efficient than you know the means on the island that we use to generate electricity. You know and electric baseboard heating is the way most people choose because in a new home it's inexpensive to install.

CARLA FOOTE: Hydro Spokesperson Dawn Dalley.