5 Simple Energy-Saving Strategies

By: Scott Pierce and Auriane Koster, Pierce Energy Planning

Energy conservation is a great way to lower a school's operational costs. These savings can be redirected into other areas where funding is needed. It doesn't have to be complicated! There are simple behaviors we can all adopt to reduce the amount of money spent on energy.

1. Turn off lights when you leave the room: If you have incandescent or fluorescent lights, you should turn them off to conserve energy whenever they're not needed. If you have compact fluorescent lights (CFLs), because of their technology, you should turn them off only if you're leaving a room for more than 15 minutes. Ideally, you should use day-lighting whenever possible and keep artificial lights off. And remember, light sensors can be tricky. Items hanging from ceilings can move when spaces are unoccupied, turning on lights. Use light sensors as a plan B. Turning off the lights manually as you leave the room is still the best practice!

2. Install a programmable thermostat: You can save as much as 10 percent a year on heating and cooling costs by turning your thermostat down (when heating) and up (when cooling) 10 degrees for eight hours a day. And the easiest way to do that is to install a programmable thermostat! Once you install your programmable thermostat, or if you already have one, set your temperature to be 10 degrees cooler in the winter or 10 degrees warmer in the summer when you're away at work. Set your temperature to return to where you want it right before you return to the office or home. Your geographical location is one factor that will dictate where thermostats should be set for occupied or unoccupied times. For example, for best results in Arizona, set temperatures to 73/85 degrees in the summer and 68/55 degrees in the winter.

3. Turn off your computer and monitor when not in use: Personal computers, especially desktops, can use a lot of electricity if they're left on when not in use. Contrary to popular thought, a PC will reach the end of its "useful" life from advances in technology long before frequent start-ups and power-downs affect their service life. Get in the habit of turning your computer and monitor off whenever you're not using it. Also, screen savers do not actually save anything! A computer uses the same amount of energy when in use as when an image-based screen saver is on. In case you forget, make sure to set your PC's energy saving mode to put the monitor to sleep after 5 minutes of inactivity and your computer to sleep after 15 minutes. Even though sleep mode still uses energy, it uses less energy than if the equipment is left on and not in sleep mode.

4. Use power strips to slay energy vampires: Most home/office electronics and appliances continue to use electricity even when in "standby" mode or when you think they're off. After all, anything with a clock - like a DVR for recording your favorite shows, a coffee maker for brewing a pot of Joe when you wake up, or an infrared receiver for receiving "on" signals from a remote control - needs continuous power to operate. To help slay the energy vampires that continuously feed on electricity, hook up all of your devices to power strips to switch off your devices completely when you're not using them.

5. Keep doors and windows closed when heating or cooling spaces: When cooling and heating spaces, people may leave doors or windows open for fresh air, therefore causing the air conditioning or heating system to operate continuously. This creates high electricity consumption and maintenance costs because leaving the door or window open will prevent the environment from reaching the thermostat's temperature setting. This problem is especially costly in schools, office buildings, restaurants and other commercial settings in which occupants are not responsible for, and probably are unaware of, high electricity, repair and maintenance costs. These costs are therefore borne by the taxpayers or owners of these buildings. Help the units be efficient and save energy by keeping doors and windows closed when heating and cooling!