



# Six steps to lower clubhouse energy costs

by Lee M. Kreul

Manager  
Elleysian Hills Country Club  
Elleysian Hills, Illinois 39203

Dear Sir:

We are sorry to inform you that due to a shortage of fuel supplies we must begin servicing our commercial customers on a strictly monthly allotment basis. Accordingly, your electric allotment for the month of January has been set at \_\_\_\_\_ k.w.

Sincerely,

Midwest Power Company  
Detroit, Indiana 40807

Is this an implausible scenario? Hardly. Many communities in the United States experienced this same situation regarding natural gas supplies this past winter.

As fossil energy supplies dwindle and alternative sources of power are developing more slowly, the very real threat of further price increases, rationing, shortages, allocations, and fuel tax increases should be incentive enough for every country club and golf course manager to take positive action now to reduce energy consumption on his property.

While many national energy-saving measures now focus on the installation of more energy efficient (but costly) equipment and buildings, solar power, and insulation, a significant re-

duction in energy consumption can be accomplished without extensive capital investment.

Notable results in the range of 20 to 30 percent reductions have been achieved throughout the hospitality industry through organized programs of conservation. One property achieved a 25 percent reduction in energy consumption without investing a penny. Why are such savings attainable? Basically, during the years of available and cheap energy, Americans developed energy wasteful habits and inefficient techniques for operating equipment. Eliminating or changing these wasteful operational habits can achieve surprisingly high savings.

However, such results are not easy to accomplish in a short period of time. Habits once ingrained in employees are not easily changed. Merely reminding employees to turn off lights, set thermostats lower in winter, or "use less" will achieve some results — but not the maximum results necessary to keep a property even with annual price increments in the cost of energy. Just to keep even with price increases and surcharges over the last 2 years, users have needed a 25 to 50 percent reduction in consumption.

In order to make significant reductions in energy costs, a club or resort must undertake an organized, all-out attack on all sources of energy usage and educate each employee to understand not only the need for energy conservation, but also each individual's responsibilities to this problem. A military general who proceeds into battle without first gaining intelligence regarding his enemies, setting objectives, having a battle plan, and placing responsibility can expect only

limited success at best, possibly defeat at the worst.

The problem of energy costs must be approached with the same careful consideration as labor or food costs. Planning, scheduling, training are as much a part of utility cost control as they are of labor and food cost control. One does not best attack "prime costs" in a haphazard fashion. Such costs are best controlled via a systematic, planned approach.

Energy costs must also be handled in a systematic manner. Essentially, there are six basic steps involved in a successful energy cost control program or system: 1) setting responsibility, 2) investigation, 3) goal setting, 4) strategy, 5) education of employees, and 6) implementation and followup.



## SETTING RESPONSIBILITY

Normally, primary responsibility for the program falls to the manager or, in some larger properties, the manager and a committee drawn from two or three departments. The task for this person or committee is to formulate, implement, and guide the program on the property. At this point, a word should be said about the role and responsibility of each individual rank-and-file employee vis a vis the program. Any program of conservation that has a people orientation vs. a

---

Lee Kreul is an assistant professor teaching lodging management, cost control, financial accounting, and consumer behavior in Purdue University's school of restaurant, hotel, and institutional management.

capital orientation cannot expect to be successful if the people are merely handed a list of "do's" and "don'ts" regarding energy-using equipment. For maximum success, energy conservation programs involving great dependence on employee activities and changing behavior must involve employees in the formulation of the plans as well as their implementation. Elicit the support of your employees to insure success for your energy conservation.



## INVESTIGATION

The next step is to determine, through intensive investigation, where your energy dollars are going and which equipment uses large amounts of energy. Find out, first of all, what the energy requirements of each of your major pieces of energy-using equipment are. Read the manuals or information on the name plates. Determine from observation or from employees when the hours of usage of this equipment occurs. Record this information.

At this point, you might want to invite a representative of your power company to walk through your property with you. Often these people can supply valuable operating tips that can aid the conservation program. Discuss the large-energy-use equipment with your employees; solicit their comments and suggestions.

Finally, review at least one year's energy bills. If you use several forms, convert all bills to a common basis (BTU's) and determine your energy costs per member or guest served. Graph these figures and update them after every billing. This activity will help you locate your biggest energy usage and help you judge the effectiveness of your program. Note changing circumstances on the charts such as severe weather, new equipment, new operating hours, or sales volume.



## GOAL SETTING

Set a realistic but ambitious goal for your program. Reductions of from 25 to 30 percent are not uncommon in many properties without much effort being put forth. As was mentioned previously, the reason such large reductions occur results from the fact that in most properties there has been little attention paid to energy costs in the past, as opposed to labor or food costs. An ambitious goal also helps to "get the adrenalin going" and makes people put forth more effort than they normally would with less ambitious goals.



## STRATEGY

From your walk-through and investigation of the operating characteristics of your equipment, workers' habits, suggestions from employees, and tips from energy reports, you should now be ready to formulate a strategy for accomplishing your goals.

Tackle the operational aspects of the large energy-using equipment first before considering replacement of equipment. In many cases, the equipment will not be used correctly or is turned on when there is really little need for doing so. For example, a favorite trick of many cooks and chefs is to turn on all kitchen equipment the first thing in the morning even though the equipment might not be needed for several hours beyond normal pre-heat time.

Include preventive maintenance procedures in your strategy. Ice makers, dishwashers, and air conditioners are notoriously ineffective and power-robbing pieces of equipment when not maintained properly.



## EMPLOYEE EDUCATION

Once you have formulated your plan — your goal — and have it recorded on paper, discuss it with your employees. Don't bring it out like a decree and impose it as a list of "do's" and "don'ts." You must **sell** them on the plan. Show them **why** it is needed and **how** it will benefit them directly. There are many appeals that could work here from national need (patriotism) to reliability of the operation (job security) to appeals to their competitive nature.



## IMPLEMENTATION AND FOLLOWUP

So, now with a written plan, an agreement, and a commitment from your employees to follow the plan, the hard part is doing it, implementing it. This takes constant vigilance, discipline, and followup. The wasteful energy practices that you and your employees have been following are really habits that are not easily overcome. You must begin now to "think conservation" in order to "attain conservation." □