

# Want to lower business costs?

## It's time to Focus on Energy

By Debra Illingworth Greene

A free program that's good for the environment and your business's bottom line? If it sounds too good to be true, read on. Focus on Energy, the state's energy-efficiency and renewable energy program, is open to nearly all Wisconsin businesses.

"Businesses spend a lot of money on wasted energy," says **Amanda Wollin**, marketing manager for **Focus on Energy-Business Programs**. "The main feedback we get from participants in the Focus program is how the projects and changes businesses make help improve their bottom line. Many businesses don't realize that energy costs are not fixed costs."

Through its technical expertise, training and financial incentives to help implement energy management projects, Focus on Energy has helped Wisconsin businesses save more than \$100 million in energy costs since 2001. At the same time, participation in the program is free. Most utilities throughout Wisconsin give a portion of their revenue to fund the program.

Once a business decides to participate, "Focus will identify and assign an energy advisor to work with the business, which is done on a case-by-case basis, depending on the help they need," Wollin explains. "Focus on Energy suggests that businesses start with simple, cost-effective projects that will reduce energy use, such as upgrading inefficient lighting systems with new, efficient ones."

"It's also important to start educating employees on energy use and taking steps to reduce consumption through behavior change," Wollin continues. For example, turning off computers when not in use and turning off

lights in rooms or areas not occupied can save a lot of money.

Once businesses have made smaller cost-effective changes, they can upgrade heating and air conditioning systems or take on other major projects.

### We'll leave the light on – for 10 minutes

**Art Bartsch** estimates that he has received \$45,000 in rebates from Focus on Energy over the past four years, and more is on the way. "That means we've spent four to five times that amount," he says. "But we're replacing things that need to be replaced. There's a premium to pay, but from a business standpoint and from an environmental standpoint, I wouldn't have it any other way."

Bartsch, with his wife, Barbara, owns four hotels in and around Dane County, including the Days Inn off the Beltline at Stoughton Road.

At his Madison Days Inn, Bartsch had a guest room energy management system installed. "Occupancy sensors recognize that a guest is in the room and turn on the heat or air conditioning. From there the guest can control the temperature," he explains. "What we deal with so much in a hotel is maintaining the temperature in a room when no one is in there."

He's also replacing all the incandescent lightbulbs in his four hotels with compact fluorescent bulbs, or CFLs. Bartsch figures his new total lighting bill will be 30 percent to 35 percent of his former bill, once the change is complete in about two months. "That's a huge savings," he says. "Lighting is a big part of your energy bill at a hotel."

Art Bartsch has partnered with Focus on Energy to help make his hotels more energy-efficient.



Photo by Amy Lynn Schreck

His biggest project to date is an addition to one of his hotels in Monroe.

"We're adding a swimming pool, fitness center, conference room and 11 guest rooms," Bartsch says. "We're not building green 100 percent, but we're putting in solar heat for the swimming pool and hot water, energy recovery ventilators and super insulation." Focus on Energy recently approved the solar systems for a rebate of nearly \$12,000.

"After we finish the Monroe project, we'll look at the Madison Days Inn and the AmericInn in Monroe for solar and more. It's an ongoing process for us — as we get funds."

Other energy-saving ideas that Bartsch is investigating: sensors on vending machines so the lights go off when no one is around and occupancy sensors for public restrooms and guest rooms.

"In the bathrooms the sensors turn the light and fan on when you go in the bathroom then turn them off 10 minutes after you leave," he says.

"We want to be responsible business owners and set an example by trying to get as much energy efficiency as we can," he says. ■

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