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At Issue

Inexpensive Ways Your Company Can Save on Energy

If you're a business owner in New Jersey, you know how high energy costs are squeezing your business. New Jersey has some of the highest electricity rates in the nation for commercial and industrial users, and costs continue to rise. Some companies are installing solar power panels or other types of alternative energy sources, but many businesses cannot afford the hundreds of thousands of dollars such projects require.

Luckily, there are plenty of ways businesses can reduce their energy usage without paying for expensive renovations to their buildings or devoting a full-time energy manager to control costs. At a recent NJBIA seminar, "Managing Energy Costs in Challenging Times," experts throughout the state offered business some advice on inexpensive ways to keep energy costs under control.

First, get your employees involved. What resources do you already have and how could they be used to implement an energy efficiency and conservation strategy? Is there some knowledgeable person on your staff who could find ways to reduce energy consumption? Are there resources for getting outside help? To get the organization started on saving, there needs to be a strategic approach. Involving everyone can be as simple as reminding people to turn lights off when they leave a conference room and turning on the power-save option on equipment.

Second, form a "green team" to help identify project areas and opportunities, develop work plans, and prepare for an official energy efficiency initiative launch or kickoff event. Staff from all departments and levels should be encouraged to be a part of the team. Projects might include raising/lowering the temperature a few degrees on programmable thermostats, encouraging the business to install automatic lighting controls or encouraging mugs instead of paper/Styrofoam cups for coffee. Each workplace is different, but there are many solutions out there to consider for your worksite.

Third, evaluate your office's energy usage. There needs to be a

baseline to measure your energy needs and areas that could be made more efficient. This can be as simple as gathering your utility bills and putting together a picture of how much energy your company uses. Many utilities have comprehensive Web sites for commercial and industrial customers that can show the historical usage (usually past 12 months) and help measure any changes in your consumption.

Energy audits are another tool to help evaluate where changes or upgrades could be beneficial. For manufacturers, the New Jersey Manufacturing Excellence Program provides free plant assessments and recommendations that improve energy efficiency and pollution prevention. For more information, visit <http://njme.rutgers.edu>. Often, suppliers or energy efficiency providers will also provide a free or low-cost audit of a facility as well.

Fourth, take advantage of what's free. Most people know the Energy Star label for appliances, but what about for buildings? Visit www.energystar.gov for practical guidebooks on making workplaces in your industry sector more energy efficient. Virtually any small business can improve its energy efficiency easily and cost-effectively using the numerous resources that are available from the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Finally, take advantage of government funding and programs. Commercial and industrial ratepayers contribute millions of dollars each year through a societal benefit charge (SBC) on your energy bills to pay for government-run energy programs. New Jersey's Clean Energy Program offers commercial and industrial customers financial incentives, design support, and technical assistance to integrate energy efficient and renewable energy technologies into new construction, upgrades, and new cooling and heating equipment installations. For specific program information, visit www.njcleanenergy.com. Many of the state programs, including the Smart Start building program, do require prior approval before rebates or incentives are awarded.

Rising energy costs are eating a larger and larger portion of the operating budgets of businesses throughout the Garden State, and there is no indication that they are going away anytime soon. So businesses need to find inexpensive ways to keep their energy costs in check. 