

FOCUS ON ENERGY IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW TO PICK AN ENERGY-USE AUDITOR

By RUTH HILL

Special to the Lehigh Valley Business

Unless you are gazing into a burning fireplace, it's impossible to see where the energy in your building is going.

Generators may hum, lights may dim and fans may blow, but the process of turning electrical current into heat, light and motion is invisible. Otherwise, you'd be able to see the power flying up the chimney with the smoke.

The average business wastes more than 15 percent of the energy it buys. Instead of increasing electrical capacity to continue to feed waste, electricity suppliers are helping owners reduce consumption by encouraging investment in efficiency.

All Pennsylvania utilities are planning for the next round of incentive programs, set to begin June 1. But making random, incentive-chasing improvements without a strategy also is a good way to waste money. For instance, a powerful new furnace might just blow more heat out the window.

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But who has time to research today's complex world of efficiency options?

Enter the energy audit. Like an accountant checking for missing money, an energy auditor

looks for wasted power.

Total energy consumption is scored against that of a similar but efficient building. The envelope is rated with tools that illuminate, powerize and/or circulate air through the building to find leakage and infiltration. Wiring is traced for resistance, heating and air conditioning evaluated, lighting costs calculated — and more.

A simple audit can start with your existing service people, ask them about the system with in their realm of their expertise. For example, if your lights are old, talk to your electrician.

Matt Sauer, service manager at Gillespie Electric Inc. in East Greenville, helps customers with their electrical systems, including getting away from outdated T12 fluorescent bulbs.

"You can save so much money on your electric. If you're a bigger facility or a mid-sized facility or even a small business, your outlay on power each month for lighting, depending on how many hours a day you run, is killing your bottom line," Sauer said.

For contractors such as Gillespie, the audit comes in the form of a free upgrade estimate, complete with the project's eligibility for rebates as well as typical payback projections. The same approach can be taken with your heating servicepeople.

For a complete checkup of your entire building, you'll want an efficiency expert. Certified Energy Management contractors can be found via the Association of Energy Engineers' website (www.aee.org). Credentialed

USING AN ENERGY AUDIT TO FULL ADVANTAGE

- ▶ Choose a credentialed efficiency auditor or talk with your existing, licensed serviceperson.
- ▶ Use the audit as a tool, not as an end in itself.
- ▶ Pay attention to upcoming incentives provided by utilities (June 1).
- ▶ Set a goal for the audit and any improvements to pay for themselves within two to three years.

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design professionals are another resource.

Sauer warned, "There are companies out there that give up out of these rebates that don't exist before."

While not all are questionable, conditions

after improvements are made.

Constantia Walker, manager-customer communications and education at PPL Electric Utilities, agreed that it is important to develop a strategy, which an audit will help you do.

"The long-term savings are a great advan-

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ce tip for schemes and inflated claims. No single auditor-certification program exists, but you can investigate the credentials of the expert you choose.

The cost of a comprehensive audit varies by facility type, facility size and depth of the evaluation. A base fee of a few hundred dollars is normal, with an additional per-square-foot charge ranging anywhere from a penny to almost a dollar.

It's important to remember, however, that the goal is to recoup the cost, usually within two to three years, through savings realized

after improvements are made.

Walker said of energy efficiency, "Yes, there is an upfront investment, but it reduces the bills and allows companies to redirect their money toward investment in other things besides spending on wasted energy."

To learn more about incentives, Walker encouraged PPL business customers to contact the E-power Solutions Team at (866) 431-5500 or visit www.ppl.com/energy-efficiency.

You can also search the website www.aee.org to find additional state, federal, local, and utility incentives.