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NKU will dim lights for holidays to cut costs

Moderate heating, low lighting may save \$25K

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While students are away, Northern Kentucky University will try to save money. For the first time, the university is taking energy-conservation measures over holiday breaks.

"We have taken relatively minor conservation measures in the past, but the current plan is by far the most aggressive the university has implemented," said Larry Blake, NKU's assistant vice president for facilities management.

Blake said there were two motivations for having the plan this year.

"The first being the conservation program the university has committed to and the second being pending budget reductions from the state," he said.

Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear has proposed 2 percent spending cuts for higher education.

The first test of the university's holiday energy-conservation measures was the four-day Thanksgiving break.

"We did little other than turn off the lights at Thanksgiving," said Black. This included lighting for buildings, parking lots and garages. "Temperatures were rather moderate and we did stop running some air handlers in the buildings. The bulk of the savings was in lighting."

Those measures saved the university approximately \$7,000.

"Just as important as the cost reduction is the fact we did not consume 113,000 kilowatt hours of electricity," said Blake.

Conservation measures over the Christmas break will start at 10 p.m. Tuesday and last until 6 a.m. Jan. 11.

The measures will include shutting down much of the campus' lighting, not plowing parking areas, keeping building temperatures at or near 55 degrees, shutting down all but one elevator in each building, and turning off exhaust fans and hot water circulating pumps. Additionally, computer labs, water coolers and all unnecessary appliances will be turned off.

"We conservatively estimate that we will save - I prefer the term cost avoidance - between \$20,000 and \$25,000 over the holiday break in electricity alone," said Blake. "Considering this action requires only the shutdown of lighting and equipment not in use when the campus is closed, this is viewed as a totally painless conservation measure that has no impact on operations. There will also be some reduction in natural gas consumption, but that is much harder to estimate."

"We could possibly save overtime cost, vehicle fuel and ice-melt salt material over the break because we will not clear snow from the closed lots should a winter storm occur. Therefore, we would invest less labor time for our snow removal crews and reduce snow removal expenses."

Blake said the campus will not be totally deserted during the holiday break. Faculty and staff may be working and many international students remain on campus. There are also a few scheduled events.

"The plan accommodates all of those activities either through ... startup of a building or maintaining services in isolated building areas," said Blake.

"We also planned the shutdown to maintain security systems and sufficient lighting to accommodate safe access around and within the buildings."

Campus Police reviewed the plan for security and will be patrolling as they normally do, he said.
