

NKU finds simple ways to save energy

By Howard McEwen • Enquirer contributor • August 21, 2010

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Northern Kentucky University saved thousands of dollars in energy consumption during the recent heat wave by simply enlisting students, faculty and staff on campus to shut off whatever they could.

"Although we were not asked to do so, we felt we should do all we could to free up electrical capacity to assist Duke Energy in supplying other - especially residential - customers," said Larry Blake, assistant vice president for facilities management. "In addition, for quite some time we have encouraged faculty, staff and students to take personal responsibility for the conservation of energy on campus. This request was an extension, although an escalation, of that program."

Blake's department sent a campuswide e-mail asking for unused electric equipment to be turned off.

Blake said the request was a success.

"Our cooling load was easily reduced by 3 to 5 percent, and electric consumption by a comparable amount," he said. "We noticed chiller load dropping during the hottest part of the day and were able to shut down one chiller about an hour before we would normally have been able to do so."

Blake said that the cost avoided is hard to estimate but reached into the thousands over the five peak days.

"Faculty and staff participation was tremendous," he said. "As I walked the campus, I found as many lights off as were on; and unnecessary computers and other equipment was shut down.

While everyone was doing their part to help reduce our consumption, they still had work to do and were getting it done."

His department also took action to save energy by reducing lighting in public areas, turning off water coolers, shutting down food service equipment that was temporarily unneeded, shut down water pumps in the fountain and lake waterfalls, among other measures.

The energy budget for NKU is for the 2010-2011 academic year is \$4.2 million.

NKU spent approximately \$4.4 million five years ago to improve the campus' heating, cooling, lighting and water systems.

"That investment is paying back at a rate of about \$650,000 per year in avoided utility costs," Blake said. "We are constantly upgrading existing controls systems to reduce consumption while improving occupant comfort in our buildings."

Last year, Blake said NKU re-roofed three buildings and in the process doubled the amount of insulation on the buildings and installed a highly reflective "cool" roof on the Business, Education and Psychology Building.

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"All that said, our largest potential savings continues to come from our high-quality building and equipment maintenance and those things each individual can personally control - turning off lights, appliances, computers and equipment that is not needed," he said.

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