

'Dark Knight' till dawn

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THURSDAY 7-10-2008

## AC on? Nope. We plugged in the ice

Businesses embrace efficiency to combat rising energy costs

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It's one cool energy saving idea.

Some large offices are using big blocks of ice to cool off on hot afternoons instead of running their air conditioners.

The buildings make the ice at night, when electricity rates are lowest, and use the ice during the day to chill the air being pumped through the structures.

It's just one example of how businesses large and small are making extra efforts to

improve the efficiency of their buildings to save energy and money.

Commercial buildings account for 18 percent of total U.S. energy consumption, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's building efficiency program. That's

1½ times the energy used by all forms of transportation, including automobiles, trains and airliners.

So improving building efficiency can be one of the most significant ways to put a dent in energy usage and reduce the need for building more power plants, energy experts say.

With energy costs and con-

cern for the environment rising in tandem, businesses are discovering that efficiency is the quickest and most cost-effective way to improve their bottom line and burnish their green credentials.

"Environmental issues, to the greatest extent possible, are about energy these days,"

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said John Conover, president of the commercial business for Trane, a New Jersey-based commercial heating, ventilation and air conditioning company that makes its controls in White Bear Lake.

Trane is part of the Alliance to Save Energy, a nonprofit coalition of businesses, government and environmental groups that has been promoting commercial energy effi-

ciency since 1997. The Alliance will be holding the group's first Minnesota event in downtown St. Paul today with Gov. Tim Pawlenty as its keynote speaker.

The Alliance knows that energy conservation doesn't have the sex appeal of wind energy or off-shore oil drilling, Conover said.

Most of the efficiency projects simply are tune-ups for heating, lighting and ventilation systems that may be decades old and badly out-of-whack.

But some projects do include

new technologies, like installing wind turbines for a school district in Sandusky, Ohio, said John Carter, vice president of energy services at Honeywell Building Solutions in Golden Valley, which is doing the job.

And the payoff can be quick, said Shawn White, a manager with Xcel Energy's program to help businesses control energy costs.

Buying rooftop air conditioners with slightly higher energy efficiency ratings can cost a retail store \$1,000 more per unit, but they'll save \$500 every

year in electricity bills over a 20-year life span, he said.

Small businesses can benefit too, said Judy Thommes, marketing manager for the Center for Energy and Environment, a Minneapolis nonprofit. Its One-Stop program saved the average small business almost \$3,000 a year, and the largest savings came from simple measures like switching to more energy-efficient bulbs, just as homeowners do, she said.

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