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DPW sets thermostats for savings

JBLM changes temperature set points, which could save \$1.15 million in energy

By Dean Siemon
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The start to saving money on a high-priced electricity bill can be as simple as a slight turn of the thermostat.

In response to the assistant secretary of the U.S. Army's January memorandum requesting temperature set points be adjusted at all military bases, Joint Base Lewis-McChord buildings approved for air conditioning will maintain a set indoor temperature of 78 degrees Fahrenheit and heating temperatures at 68 degrees during cooler months.

The heating and cooling adjustments are about a difference of two degrees which translates to a 5 percent reduction in energy use.

The annual savings can potentially be about \$1.15 million annually.

In 2012 the annual energy expense was more than \$24 million for JBLM office buildings and other facilities, not including barracks on the installation.

"Each month we are spending \$2 million in energy costs," said Sakhawat Amin, energy program coordinator for the Directorate of Public Works. "Per day, we are spending about \$66,000."

Amin said there are exceptions for certain facilities on base, like medical clinics, child care facilities and computer server rooms.

But for the typical office building, government employees will be asked to dress appropriately for the weather and trap natural cool air in the buildings during early mornings and evenings.

"The idea is if you're doing the right thing with your buildings, you can get your building pretty cool," said Miriam Easley, DPW sustainability outreach coordinator.

By opening windows when first arriving to work, cool air enters the room and naturally regulates the temperature downward. Easley also recommends using a window fan to circulate the cool air throughout the building.

"And then as soon as it starts getting warm, we shut it down," Easley said. "We close blinds, we close windows and it actually keeps it at a fairly decent temperature."

For barracks and onbase housing, Easley suggests leaving windows open during the night to collect enough cool air to last throughout the summer days.

During the cooler months an easy remedy is to wear a light jacket or sweater since temperatures often don't fall below 60 degrees.

Energy conservation doesn't stop at adjusting the thermostat. Many standard office items use a lot of power — personal refrigerators, personal heaters and even personal air conditioning units.

“Not everybody needs all that stuff,” Easley said.

Energy use with such items adds up quickly with about 30,000 people living and working on JBLM, and more than 100,000 people entering and leaving the base each year.

While conserving the budget, DPW is also hoping energy costs can reach a net zero goal as part of the Net Zero sustainability program — a balanced input-output ratio for energy, water, waste, land and air by the year 2020.

“For energy, it would be to reduce enough and produce enough to where we're not getting energy from outside sources and we're not wasting any,” Easley said. “Making us an island — kind of an enclosed loop.”

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