

**DEALING RESPONSIBLY  
WITH THE ENERGY CRISIS**

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**Tangible Solutions for the Commercial Sector – and Others – to Save Energy**

By Todd Robinette

A recent news article cited opinion poll research showing that most Californians believe the energy crisis was manufactured by energy companies for the purposes of profiteering. Yet, at this point, to debate who's responsible for the problem is akin to not seeing the forest for the trees. We're neck deep in it, and it's up to us to do something about it.

This is particularly true for California's commercial sector and for office workers, who can make an enormous impact. Large and small offices account for 11 percent of total annual electricity demand for the state. During peak demand, commercial air conditioning accounts for 14.5 percent and commercial lighting amounts to 11 percent, respectively, of system usage statewide. That's 25.5 percent of total system usage during peak demand.

That being the case, a valid argument can be made that, if businesses and their employees reduce their rate of consumption, they'll help significantly in avoiding an economic downturn we can expect by not doing so. By lowering energy usage, they alleviate the need to increase the price of consumer goods and services, thereby avoiding the double whammy of higher prices *and* excessive utility bills that will undermine consumer confidence.

There are a multitude of tangible measures businesses of all sizes can take to drastically reduce their consumption and, in turn, lessen the long-term demand for energy. Governor Gray Davis' call for a 10 percent, across the board, reduction in energy usage is a step in the right direction. Yet much more can be done, including:

- β Building managers and tenants should collaborate on developing conservation training seminars with the goal of immediately reduce lighting levels by 25 percent – and, if possible, an additional 25 percent once a Stage II or worse emergency is declared;
- β Office building managers and tenants should collaborate on energy conservation programs, particularly in the summer months. This includes elevating temperature controls in all public and private office and retail buildings, when possible, to 78 degrees; and
- β Office building managers, tenants, contractors and union representatives should encourage energy efficient cleaning practices, empowering janitors to begin cleaning earlier and to shut off lights in unoccupied space.

Simple measures, such as closing blinds and shades where windows contribute to higher indoor temperatures and where outside light is not required, keeping the lights and other office fixtures off in unused rooms and turning them off after business hours, etc., can go a long way in reducing the commercial sector's demand for energy.

Local residents also have a vested interest in mitigating the problem – otherwise they face the consequences of not only increased energy bills but higher prices for consumer products and services. Simply put, Bay Area communities must be willing to allow reasonably sited power plants to be built and/or expanded.

Local residents also should pressure our local elected officials and administrators to act in the best interest of the entire community. To wit: San Francisco imports 60 percent of its energy from outside the City. The remaining 40 percent comes from the Potrero and Bay View Hunters Point power plants. These plants should not be shut down, as Mayor Brown recently pledged regarding the Hunters point facility, but renovated to maintain and/or increase their current output.

City officials also should explore developing alternative sources of energy, including co-generation. For example, the steam plant on San Francisco's Sixth Street now generates steam to heat commercial buildings on the local power grid. That same facility can generate 60 megawatts of electricity – enough power to serve 60,000 San Francisco homes – but presently does not. The appropriate parties should act quickly to approve permits necessary to allow the Sixth Street facility to provide electric power.

The greater point is that it's time to move beyond finger pointing and take very reasonable – and achievable – steps to reducing energy consumption. It's to their credit that those in the business community have remained above the fray and taken a workman-like approach to dealing with the issue. By taking a few added measures, we can further reduce consumption and help in lessening the long-term demand for energy. Our local economy will be better for it.

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