

Businesses can reduce energy costs

By Allison Ryan
NewsTribune Reporter

Zero-energy buildings may be decades away, but that doesn't mean businesses can't do a lot to cut their energy costs now.

Donald Fournier, program manager of the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, conducted a seminar Tuesday night on small business strategies to conserve energy and reduce costs. About a dozen people turned out to hear about the state of energy consumption in the United States and how SEDAC could help them save money at the Spring Valley City Hall.

Fournier began by describing the various sources of energy, including natural gas, coal and oil, all of which have become more expensive and more scarce in recent years.

"These price increases are real, and they're going to go up in the future, not down," Fournier said. The biggest potential new source of energy — more powerful than solar, wind, or new sources of oil — would come from conservation, he said.

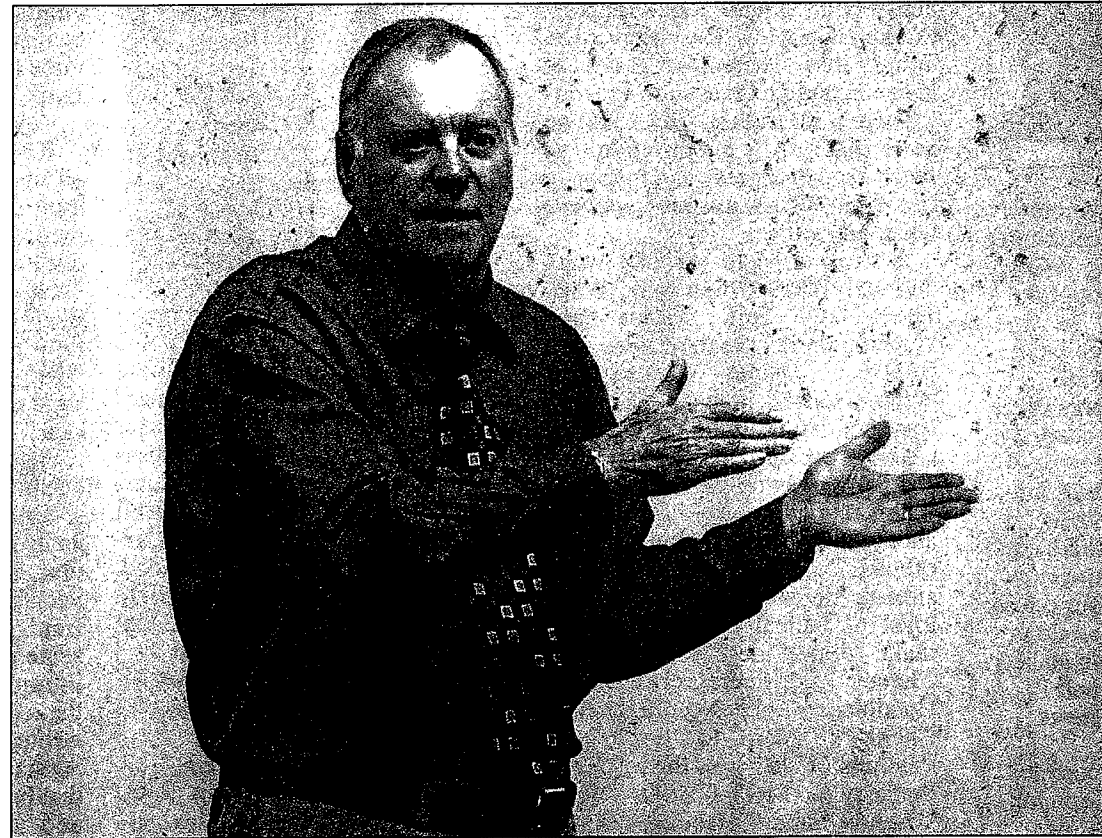
"If we used everything the same way we did in 1979, today, we'd be using 40 percent more," Fournier said. And there are simple, inexpensive or no-cost ways to reduce that use even further, such as purchasing only Energy Star

appliances: to bear the energy star, an appliance must use no more than two watts when plugged in and not in use, whereas other appliances can use up to 20 watts. That adds up to the output of two 1,000-mgawatt power plants, Fournier said.

He outlined the four step process SEDAC uses to identify and help businesses implement means to reduce their energy costs, including providing information and conducting energy audits.

For businesses planning a new building, Fournier recommended building "beyond code" — building to stricter energy specifications than state-required minimums. That's going to become a tall order, since the American Institute of Architects who issue the recommendations for building codes have set a goal of requiring new commercial and public buildings to use zero net energy: no more electricity, heating or cooling than they can produce on their own. From solar panel shingles to high-tech windows that also would function as solar cells, to nanotechnology allowing a geothermal-style system to convert sunlight into heat, those buildings will require the use of technology that is not yet available.

In the meantime, and at a much lower cost, Fournier recommended business owners contact SEDAC and have a free energy audit done to



NewsTribune photo/ Allison Ryan

Donald Fournier, program manager of the Smart Energy Design Assistance Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, talks to local business owners about energy conservation Tuesday night at a seminar in Spring Valley.

review the areas where they could make the biggest improvements. On average, he said a business could cut its energy costs by 39 percent, and in some cases, by as much as 70 percent.

Some in attendance at the seminar planned to look further into what specific changes

their businesses could make.

"Sounds like we better use this while it's here, while it's free," said Paul Innis of Aqua Control. "Seems like it would be kind of silly not to ... Our utility bills are very high and it looks like they're getting higher all the time."

Jim Cabanass, operations

manager at Riverview Marine, shared Innis' opinion.

"The price is right ... it's definitely worth filling out (an application) and going through all the steps," Cabanass said.

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Ways to cut energy costs

Business owners can reduce their energy costs by making the following adjustments:

- Install and use a programmable thermostat.

- Install a ventilation control system.

- Replace light switches with automatic light sensors to prevent lights being left on needlessly.

- Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs, and replace T12 fluorescent lights with brighter, more efficient T8 fluorescent lights.

- Shield windows from sunlight with awnings, window shades, or window films to reduce air-conditioning costs.

- Caulk and weather-strip windows and doors.

- Schedule a free energy audit by calling Smart Energy Design Assistance Center at (217)-265-0681 or visit www.sedac.org for more information.