

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES IN ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Burnside Ecosystem Column

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A new report by the Pew Center for Global Climate Change which investigated policies and practices of leading energy efficient companies has found that “a robust energy efficiency strategy can reduce costs, manage risks, ease environmental compliance, boost employee morale, and open doors to greater innovation and productivity.” (deFontaine, 2009, GreenBiz.com)

The report is part of a major initiative launched by the Pew Center which includes a web portal and a comprehensive searchable database of measures taken by these leading companies. The latter includes companies such as ABB, Alcoa, Baxter, Boeing and BP. Look for www.pewclimate.org/energy-efficiency on the web.

One of the interesting findings of the study is that employee engagement can play an important part in improving energy efficiency but it is often an underutilized strategy. After all what do employees know? They just come in and earn their paycheques and leave at the end of the day, don't they? Presumably most managers want committed employees who will grow with the company. Once you spend a reasonable amount of money finding and training employees, one would expect that you would want to retain them. And some studies have found that environmental commitment and social responsibility make employees feel better about the companies with which they are employed. Wasting energy is one of those things that demonstrates a lack of environmental commitment and social responsibility.

The leading companies studied by the Pew Center on Global Climate Change found that 89% are actively involving employees. Some of the methods used to engage employees, from most to least used, are inclusion of energy efficiency messaging in newsletters and general communications to employees, training sessions, “greening the workplace” programs, establishing green or energy conserving teams, workplace intranet, suggestion boxes, targeted energy efficiency campaigns, signage, reward or incentive schemes, “lunch and learn” sessions.

For many leading companies, changing the culture of the company and its workforce and raising awareness of ways of enhancing efficiency and continuous improvement of practices has resulted in measurable benefits. The reasons behind their efforts range from a commitment to reduce their carbon footprint, cost control related to energy costs, social responsibility, enhancing innovation and productivity, risk management, offering new products or services, and finally anticipating regulations. Strangely, employee engagement programs tend to receive the least financial and staff resources when compared to other efficiency initiatives. Get your employees engaged. It will return dividends you had not anticipated.

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