

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Energy Conservation - Saving the Association Money

In many common-wall communities, including villas, townhomes, and condominiums, it is not uncommon for the Homeowners Association to pay for some of the resident utilities like water, power, and heat. In an ideal world, the residents would use these utilities conservatively however, this is not always the case.

What is Wasting Energy Around Your Community?

Do faucets drip? Do you have low flow faucets? Are your shower heads dripping? Do you have low flow shower heads? Do you have a programmable thermostat or clock for your heater or AC? Are all exterior lights using compact fluorescent bulbs? These are just a few samples of questions that should be asked if the Association is paying utility bills that relate to these items.

Dripping faucets. 10 drips per minute wastes 526 gallons of water a year. The same principle applies to other association paid utilities. Lights are often left on when no one is home, and if it is an incandescent bulb, that is really costing you!

Light Bulbs.

In many associations, light bulb replacement continues like the Sorcerer's Apprentice: it burns out, you replace it, it burns out, you replace it... you get the picture. When it comes to servicing exterior lighting, there are a variety of considerations such as:

- Do the bulbs provide enough light for security and safety?
- What does burn-out replacement cost in time and money?
- How much do the bulbs themselves cost?
- What the cost of energy is.

While CF's (compact fluorescents) are more expensive than incandescent bulbs (around \$4.00 vs \$.50) the extra-long life (approximately 10,000 hours compared to 750), reduced bulb changes (fewer maintenance hours on changing bulbs) and brighter light, more than make up for the cost difference. Watt a difference! When it comes to conserving energy and reducing costs, it's the drips and watts that'll get you.

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

Building Insulation. Sealing cracks, gaps, leaks, and adding insulation can save up to 10% on home or building heating and cooling costs.

Window Treatments. If your building windows are single pane, consider replacing with more energy efficient windows, adding solar shades, tinting film, or using blackout curtains that reduce the amount of heat.

What Can Your Association Do to Save Energy, and in Turn Money on Utilities?

Analyze utility usage. Looking at the last 24-36 months of utility bills can reveal a lot. Is usage consistent for the months in question? If the total yearly usage is divided by the number of homes by 12 months, is it consistent with utility company averages? If not, roll up your sleeves, you've got work to do. Utility bills are usually one of a community association's biggest expenses. A 5-10% reduction may translate into thousands of dollars of savings for the Association.

Perform a Utility Audit. All units should be surveyed for fixtures that control association paid utilities. The first step is to send out a checklist form with the post-paid return envelope to all residents. The survey should include questions and items you need the resident to respond to. Ask questions like: Are your toilets running? Include info about how to test to see if they are running by placing several drops of blue dye in the tank and in a few minutes if it shows up in the bowl, its running.

Schedule repairs. Once you have the questionnaires back, determine what needs to be done. Approach this campaign as a way of saving a bucket load of money to deter claims of invasion of privacy. Explain in dollars and cents how reducing water consumption by 10%, 20% or even 30% could affect the monthly assessment. Since water is a major budget item, the reduction is significant.

Based on the savings, the community association can justify paying for the repairs and it is cheaper for everyone if they're done efficiently. These repairs can be done by maintenance people who charge a fraction of what plumber's charge.

Perform repairs. Pick a weekend when a repair crew can do repairs and advise resident of the schedule and the need to be home during no more than a 2-hour

THE COMMUNITY BUILDER

time frame. Using the returned Utility Audit as guides, have crews equipped with toilet tank repair kits, an assortment of faucet washers, low-flow water restrictors, 13-watt compact fluorescent bulbs, programmable clocks for heat and move quickly from house to house. The repairs shouldn't take more than 15-30 minutes per unit. At this rate, two men could do 40 homes or more in a day.

There may be several units that cannot be accessed because the owner is unavailable. Arrange another weekend to finish up. There may be a few who refuse access but with 80-90% compliance, the project is a great success. If there is evidence that a holdout's unit is leaking water (you can hear it running), it may qualify under the community association's emergency access rights.

Fortunately, there is a handy solution that maximizes utility while minimizing cost called compact fluorescent bulbs. They come in many sizes and shapes that fit your existing fixtures.

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