

PRACTICING WHAT IT PREACHES



State's Department of Energy has helped Oregon become fifth in nation for energy efficiency

Beth Casper
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The Oregon Department of Energy's efforts to help Oregonians save energy at home and at work have resulted in thousands of residents insulating their buildings, installing LED lights and replacing heating and cooling systems for ultra-energy efficient ones.

It's one of the reasons why Oregon ranks fifth in the nation for energy-efficiency, according to the scorecard put out by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

The efforts within the agency are equally impressive. They showcase a sustainable agency that models best practices and operates with as little impact to the environment as possible.

In 2008, the energy department became the first state agency to earn EarthWISE certification from Marion County. The EarthWISE program is a free business environmental assistance program of Marion County. EarthWISE staff helps businesses recycle, save energy, reduce waste and much more. To earn certification, a business meets criteria in six areas.

The agency also received the first EarthWISE "Sustainable Organization of the Year" award in 2010. Since then, 29 other State of Oregon buildings have become EarthWISE certified.

The energy department continues to lead in sustainability measures.

Before the agency moved its offices in December 2016 to a Department of Administrative Services building at 550 Capitol St. NE, new windows and insulation made the building's envelope ultra-efficient. Walls were demolished to make way for better air ventilation and LED lights replaced all the fluorescent ones. Instead of operating at the national average for energy use intensity for offices at 67.3 kBtu per square foot per year, the energy department runs at 26.1 — the lowest of all the DAS-owned offices. That level gives their building an Energy Star score of 99 out of 100.

"We really kept our operational requirements to a minimum while still keeping employees comfortable," said Kaci Radcliffe, an Energy Analyst and the department's Sustainability Coordinator. "Our building is a really good model for more sustainable office space for the state. Other state agency employees come through to tour our building to see what is different."



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Kaci Radcliffe
Energy analyst and the department's sustainability coordinator

The new building sports 32 solar panels, which generate up to 8,300 watts of power. But even when thinking about renewable energy, agency administrators didn't ignore waste prevention: Eight of the solar panels came from the old building at 625 Marion St. NE where they had provided about 1,100 watts of power.

In addition to a sustainable infrastructure, the 85 energy department employees also make standard practices environmentally friendly.

Recycling is extensive and includes unusual items such as CDs, video cassettes and Styrofoam. A surplus room is full of items available for reuse — paper, notepads, organizational supplies and refills for pens can be found there. It is simply a habit for staff to go to the surplus room for needed items or to leave items after cleaning a work space.

Reuse is even common in the kitchen area at the Department of Energy. Employees bring in extra garden produce or leftovers from a potluck, label them with an agency-supplied sticker and ensure that the food doesn't become waste. Inedible food becomes compost.

"Food waste has been identified by the Department of Environmental Quality and Marion County as a primary category for community impact and we are taking that very seriously," said Radcliffe. "We provided training to our staff about food waste."

In addition to Energy Star appliances and compost containers, the kitchen area is stocked with reusable utensils and dishware. For events that require more serving ware, the agency purchases compostable plates, cups and silverware.

For meetings outside of Salem, the agency has its own vehicle fleet. To conserve fossil fuels and reduce carbon emissions, the agency has a fully electric Nissan Leaf and two hybrids. Staff members choose those vehicles first when checking out a car.

See ENERGY, Page 2F

From top to bottom: Repurposed wood from a local company was used for some of the walls at the Department of Energy. | Multiple charging stations in the parking lot make it easy to keep electric vehicles charged. | An easily identified bike named Margaret is available for local trip use instead of a vehicle. | 32 solar panels, which generate up to 8,300 watts of power, sit atop a southern-facing structure in the building's parking lot. PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL | ILLUSTRATION BY NOEMI GONZALEZ/USA TODAY NETWORK, AND GETTY IMAGES

Energy

Continued from Page 1F

If a meeting is nearby, employees have the option of taking Margaret, a hot pink cruiser bicycle named after a beloved former employee.

To ensure the longevity of sustainability at the department, the agency adopted a sustainability policy on Earth Day in 2016.

“EarthWISE gives us good day-to-day ideas and practical procedures to implement,” Radcliffe said. “The sustainability policy looks broader — past the daily operations.”

The agency’s mission statement has also been updated to “Leading Oregon to a safe, clean and sustainable energy future” from its previous one that mostly focused on reducing energy costs.

“When we do communications and outreach, we build sustainability and energy savings into our educational materials,” Radcliffe said. “It is just part of our everyday work.”

The Oregon Department of Energy’s sustainability work can be found at <http://www.oregon.gov/energy/About-Us/Pages/Sustainability.aspx>.

To learn more about the EarthWISE program, visit www.mcEarthWISE.