Energy Star-rated facilities save businesses money

Installing light sensors, tinting windows reduce energy output

BY MELINDA CARSTENSEN

One way businesspeople can reduce utility costs and greenhouse emissions is to get their buildings Energy Star-rated.

The Energy Star rating, made available in 1999, certifies 12 different types of commercial buildings, ranging from industrial retail to banking facilities and water treatment plants, for reducing energy consumption.

However, there are only 27 Energy Star-rated buildings in Orlando and 451 in Florida.

To improve that statistic, 40 local environmental experts and activists joined the Central Florida Energy Efficiency Alliance, a group that uses federal grant money to educate businesses about energy efficiency. Its goal is to reduce energy consumption in commercial buildings by 30 percent by 2012.

To achieve that goal, the alliance has several campaigns lined up, including encouraging businesses to sign up for the Kilowatt Crackdown Challenge, an effort to educate businesses about the Energy Star rating and overall energy efficiency.

As of late June, 1,400 commercial buildings in Orlando had signed up, said Christina Webb, the alliance's executive director.

Where to apply for the rating: www.energystar.gov

How the rating is calculated: First, a business enters its building's monthly utility bills online into the Energy Star portfolio manager. Using that data, the system compares the building to others like it nationwide, taking building characteristics and weather factors into consideration. The system then rates the building on a score from 1-100. A building must earn a 75 to qualify for the Energy Star top performance rating. To get a plaque and be recognized by Energy Star, you must prove the data is correct by hiring an engineer to inspect your building.

Some of the rating components: Moisture, lighting and plugloads (how many pieces of electronic equipment are plugged in)

How to earn the rating: A lot has to do with employee awareness and cutting out bad habits. For example, it's important that employees turn off computers, fax machines and lights when they're not in use.

Christina Webb

Title: Executive director, Central Florida Energy Efficiency Alliance

Birthplace: Gulf Port, Miss.

Education: Bachelor's in international relations and master's in environmental policy, University of Central Florida

Little-known fact: I'm a huge soccer fan.

First job: In college, I worked for the World Trade Center and created business plans for South American countries that wanted to open new offices in Orlando.

Motto: Live with purpose.

Hobbies: Soccer, paddle boarding

Biggest business accomplishment: I was one of the five founders of the U.S. Green Building Council.

The easiest change a business can make to its building: Window tinting

What else you can do: Hire a professional to ensure all your building's components work correctly, looking at everything from the lighting to the HVAC system to insulation.

How long it takes to get the rating: If you enter your building's 12-month data, get a 75 on the Energy Star portfolio manager and hire an engineer immediately to qualify the data, it could take a matter of days. Hiring an engineer could cost anywhere from $500 to $1,000, depending on the size and type of building.