AUSTIN PUBLIC SCHOOLS USES ENERGY SAVINGS TO PUT HEALTHIER FOOD ON THE MENU

In Minnesota, tight public education budgets coupled with increased energy costs have forced public school districts to look for creative solutions to save money. One Minnesota school district, Austin Public Schools, decided to balance its need for new kitchen equipment with its commitment to energy efficiency by purchasing ENERGY STAR® qualified food service equipment for kitchens at Austin High School, Southgate Elementary, Banfield Elementary, and Neveln Elementary. Each year, this new energy-efficient food service equipment is expected to save the district around 32,000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity, 400 therms of natural gas, and 340,000 gallons of water. The new equipment will reduce the district's utility bills by more than $3,500 per year and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. To support the district's investment in energy-efficient kitchen equipment, Austin Utilities provided a cash incentive of $4,675.

According to the school district's Director of Food and Nutritional Services, Mary Weikum, the district was interested in using ENERGY STAR qualified equipment from the outset of the project. "I equate the government-backed ENERGY STAR with savings," she said. As a result, the district replaced its outdated and inefficient equipment with three ENERGY STAR qualified commercial reach-in refrigerators, three ENERGY STAR qualified commercial reach-in freezers, two ENERGY STAR qualified steamers, and three ENERGY STAR qualified hot food holding cabinets. In addition, the district purchased four gas convection ovens that meet Austin Utilities' program requirements. These requirements are based on energy efficiency criteria developed by the PG&E Food Service Technology Center that complement ENERGY STAR specifications by covering additional types of food service equipment.

> "Be sure to get insight from others who have knowledge of what is available and work closely with your local utility. Manufacturers are knowledgeable about the equipment, but guidance from kitchen specialists, buildings and grounds employees, and other schools that have completed similar retrofits was essential to the successful completion of this project."
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> —Carmel Taylor,
> Energy Efficiency Coordinator, Austin Public Schools

Project Costs and Savings

Estimated incremental cost*	$19,000
Austin Utilities incentives	$4,675
Estimated annual utility bill savings	$3,560
Simple payback	4 years

*Incremental cost is estimated based on national EPA averages for ENERGY STAR qualified equipment.

Weikum said the district has seen a number of other benefits in addition to the energy savings associated with more efficient equipment. For example, the high school was able to get rid of its deep fryer. This resulted in a safer kitchen that requires much less ventilation and energy to operate. Plus, taking fried foods off the menu means healthier food choices for students. Weikum noted, "With this new, more efficient equipment, we're looking forward to spending less on energy and more on menu items like fresh fruit, vegetables, and stir fry that were typically budget breakers in the past."

Carmel Taylor, Energy Efficiency Coordinator for the school district, agreed with Weikum's assessment of the benefits of the new equipment. "The steamers provide better color and flavor in the food, and foods prepared in the braising pan are healthier," Taylor said. "Plus, the new hot food holding cabinets save time for the kitchen staff and are much safer for moving hot foods from the kitchen area to the cafeteria."

Products that earn the ENERGY STAR® prevent greenhouse gas emissions by meeting strict energy efficiency guidelines set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. **www.energystar.gov**

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Taylor said Weikum and others did a great deal of research and relied on consulting help from local equipment dealer Hawkeye Foodservice Distribution, to learn more about energy-efficient commercial food service equipment. She said this expertise was essential to ensuring that the district got the right equipment to meet its needs. She recommends others take this step before making similar decisions.

The Austin Public School District is also a member of the Schools for Energy Efficiency™ (SEE) program, run by Hallberg Engineering, Inc. of White Bear Lake, Minnesota. SEE is a comprehensive initiative that helps K-12 schools in Minnesota develop and implement strategies for reducing energy use and related expenses. The program employs a number of ENERGY STAR tools and systems to help deliver these savings, including the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's national energy performance rating system to benchmark energy use, help set energy-saving goals, and track changes in energy consumption over time. Since SEE began in 2003, more than 250 schools have participated, reducing energy use by 12 percent on average and producing aggregated utility bill savings of $10 million. In 2007 the SEE program achieved the ENERGY STAR Partner of the Year designation for its innovative approach to promoting efficient building operations and energy awareness among staff and students of Minnesota schools.

The switch to ENERGY STAR qualified food service equipment emphasizes the Austin Public School district's dedication to becoming a model of energy efficiency. Since joining the SEE program in 2005, the district has reduced its energy use by 10 percent and saved $142,000. In addition, the district recently achieved national recognition as an ENERGY STAR Leaders Top Performer for 2007. This designation means the school district achieved a district-wide rating of 75 or greater in EPA's energy performance rating system. The rating system is used to benchmark a building's energy performance, on a scale of 1 to 100, relative to similar buildings across the country. The seven buildings operated by the school district had an average energy performance rating of 81, and four of the district's buildings have earned the ENERGY STAR label.

With the new ENERGY STAR qualified food service equipment, Taylor said she expects the district will further improve upon these impressive results for 2007, saving on energy costs, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and ensuring a healthy, comfortable environment at Austin Public Schools.

ENERGY STAR Qualified Equipment

Equipment	Manufacturer/Model
3 reach-in refrigerators	True T-49
3 reach-in freezers	True T-49F
2 electric steamers	AccuTemp S62083D080
3 hot food holding cabinets	Winston HA4522

Minnesota Rebates for Energy-Efficient Food Service Equipment

Austin Utilities and 17 other municipal utilities in Minnesota—all members of the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA)—offer a comprehensive range of cash incentives for energy-efficient commercial food service equipment.

For additional information on commercial food service incentives offered by SMMPA member utilities, call (800) 237-8992 or visit: **www.SaveEnergyInMyCommunity.com**.

For more information on commercial food service equipment that has earned the ENERGY STAR, visit: **www.energystar.gov/cfs**.

For the list of commercial food service equipment meeting the energy efficiency specifications developed by the PG&E Food Service Technology Center, visit: **http://www.fishnick.com/saveenergy/rebates/**.

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