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Sarasota County asks employees and residents to ‘Get Energy Smart’

Sarasota County today debuted a new public and employee outreach campaign to reduce energy consumption in the wake of volatile fuel costs. The campaign is aimed at lowering county energy costs and greenhouse gas emissions, while encouraging citizens to carefully consider how they use energy as well. It was presented as part of the county’s new Energy Management Action Plan during the regular commission meeting Dec. 10.

According to County Administrator Jim Ley, reducing energy costs is vital to keeping Sarasota County economically viable. “In 2007, the county spent \$13.7 million on electric, natural gas and vehicle fuels — more than 1 percent of the overall budget,” said Ley. “If we can cut energy costs by just 20 percent, we’ll save nearly \$2.7 million, taxpayer dollars that could potentially remain in operations to provide services and pay personnel. That fact alone makes energy an unrivaled opportunity to transform and preserve our community and, more immediately, our organization’s capacity to achieve its public service mission.”

Sarasota County has set an energy reduction goal of 20 percent in the next three years as a concrete and immediate commitment to accomplish financial and environmental sustainability goals. In July 2006, the county adopted the American Institute of Architects 2030 Challenge. That challenge requires the county to build and renovate buildings to be carbon neutral by that date, with interim aggressive fossil fuel reduction targets. In September of this year, the county accepted the Environmental Protection Agency’s ENERGY STAR Challenge to reduce energy consumption by 10 percent by October 2009.

“Sarasota County is committed to do its part to shift our energy portfolio to cleaner energy sources through the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency,” said Sarasota County Commission Chair Shannon Staub. “Clean energy reduces the pollution linked to asthma and other health ailments, and it improves drinking water quality and natural water resources. It generates economic development through clean technology and implementation of renewable energy alternatives. It influences our dependence on foreign oil and vulnerability to fuel shortages due to hurricanes or other emergencies, and it affects the rate of climate change.”

Sarasota County Natural Resources Manager Amy Meese says that when it comes to energy reduction, “We’re not just asking you to think outside the box. We want you to think about whether you really need the box at all, whether you could use a smaller box, whether you could use the box for something else, and any number of other creative ideas that can lead to real solutions today.”

To help spur that conversation, Meese and her staff have created a new Web site, www.scgov.net/GetEnergySmart, where residents can find extensive resources on everything from saving fuel to conserving water and making smarter transportation choices.

For more information about Sarasota County’s energy initiatives, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000, or visit www.scgov.net/GetEnergySmart.