

FOODSERVICE EAST | GUEST COLUMN | OCTOBER 15, 2015
ENERGY SAVING STRATEGIES FOR RESTAURANTS



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By, Nate Kessman, Vice President of Business Development, Great Eastern Energy

Becoming more sustainable means different things to different people. For me, it's playing with my children on a pristine beach in Cape Cod and asking myself what I can do to ensure that this same beach will remain as clean in 5, 10 or even 30 years when my children will hopefully bring their own kids back to the same beach.

A sustainable future is not sitting in the hands of one person, or a group of people. But rather, it lies in the hands of everyone. No matter your profession or industry, there are ways to reduce consumption and save energy. Plus, reducing your consumption means more money in your pocket – It's a win-win!

Restaurants in particular use 5-7 times more energy than other commercial buildings. So, even if you have a small 1,000 square foot restaurant, you are consuming enough energy to power a 5,000-7,000 square foot retail space. That concentrated usage translates to energy accounting for 3-5% of total operating costs every year. However, this can also be seen as an opportunity to create a huge financial gain by a minimal reduction in energy consumption.

Need more convincing that being sustainable is the way to go? It turns out that reducing energy consumption can help your business thrive in other ways as well. In a recent poll, fifty-two percent of consumers said they would be more likely to patron restaurants that practice sustainability over those that don't.

So, how do we reduce energy consumption and save energy, specifically in the restaurant industry? Here are a few quick and painless ways to improve efficiency, involve employees and reduce overhead in the process:

Get to Know the "Big 4"

Sixty-nine to eighty-one percent of energy consumed in a restaurant comes from four main sources: cooking, heating water, refrigeration and lighting. There are plenty of things you might already be doing to promote sustainability, from buying locally farmed fish to using biodegradable to-go containers, which is great, but I bet your ovens are on full blast between lunch and dinner and that's not efficient.

Water, Water, Everywhere

Fix every leaky faucet, toilet, and water connection on your dish machines and sinks. A toilet that constantly runs can cost an extra \$1,000 per year in NYC. After that, focus on water heating with these strategies:

- Check thermostats on water heaters for proper temperature (140 degrees) and adjust as necessary
- Install or program a [recirculation pump](#)
- Insulate pipes and use heater "jackets" to avoid heat loss
- Upgrade your water heater to the highest efficiency unit possible

Now You're Cooking - with Gas

Cooking accounts for about 25% of total energy consumption in a restaurant so it should come as no surprise that making small adjustments here can help you reap big rewards. Try these low cost solutions to help cut energy usage related to cooking:

- Set a regular cleaning and maintenance schedule
- Clean equipment will run most efficiently
- Cut idle time and turn off/down appliances when not in use by implementing a startup and shutdown program
- Upgrade to Energy Star equipment whenever possible

HVAC & Refrigeration

Keeping the fish chilled and your patrons comfortable in the dining room accounts for an average of 13% of total energy usage in a restaurant. Taking these steps can help reduce consumption dramatically:

- Set automatic thermostats; every degree you turn the A/C up in the summer can reduce usage by 4-5%
- Make sure you keep condenser coils clean and replace worn gaskets on freezers, walk-ins, lowboys, etc.
- Add strip curtains and automatic door closers to walk-ins
- Install electronic control modules (ECM's) on evaporator and condenser fans that can reduce usage by two thirds

Light at the end of the tunnel

Lighting can account for up to 12% of total energy usage, so there is no excuse not to make some low cost high ROI upgrades like these:

- Replace all incandescent bulbs with high efficiency LEDs and reduce energy consumption related to lighting by up to 50%
- Add occupancy sensors to closets, stairways, locker rooms, storage rooms and other lightly used spaces

Often overlooked, but perhaps the most important aspect of improving efficiency, is employee engagement. Hold a meeting explaining why you are making changes pertaining to your energy use, when the changes will take place and how your employees can get involved. Since your staff is ultimately responsible for the execution of the plan, be sure to review progress quarterly and reward each small improvement.

Reducing energy use is right at your fingertips. Start now by setting some realistic goals, creating a plan that employees can be engaged in and tracking your progress with an energy advisor.

Nate Kessman is a graduate of Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, where he studied the Culinary Arts and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Business Management. In late 2010, Kessman became the Director of Business Development at [Great Eastern Energy](#). Focusing on customer loyalty and service, Nate has used a team approach to help grow new markets and improve the customer experience. This has proven to be so successful that Nate was promoted to Vice President of Business Development before the end of his first year. Connect with Nate on [LinkedIn](#) and [@natekessman](#) on Twitter. For more information about Great Eastern Energy, please visit www.greateasternenergy.com.