

How many people does it take to change 3,637 light bulbs on Boylston Street?

(How concerted action in one large building can make a huge difference)

by
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As we try to “cut carbon” in the Back Bay, think about this: the 780 apartments in Avalon at the Prudential Center light up the dark with about 14,000 light bulbs in their individual apartments (not counting common areas such as hallways). The Environmental Affairs Committee of the Prudential Center Residents Association (PCRA) decided to help “Green the City and Green the World” with an ongoing campaign that started in 2010. With active support from Avalon Management and Avalon Maintenance Department, we teamed up with NSTAR Electric who provided free compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), consultants at Conservation Services Group, and more recently with Mass Save Multi-Family Energy Retrofit Program.

Our first year-long campaign to save energy in 2010 encouraged residents to replace traditional incandescent bulbs with energy efficient compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). The “opt-in” program was successful beyond our expectations. The result was 29 percent of our 780 units installed a total of 3,637 free CFLs. This represents removing about 41 tons of carbon (CO₂) from the atmosphere yearly (according to Boston University estimates).

In 2010 in addition to distributing free CFLs, NSTAR electricians (without charge) also retrofitted 220 existing fluorescent kitchen ceiling fixtures with newer, more energy efficient fluorescent bulbs. This February we offered remaining residents a second round of free kitchen light upgrades. We are pleased to report that 210 residents took advantage of the 2012 kitchen light upgrade, bringing our grand total to 55% participating apartments (430 of 780 apartments). The kitchen upgrade saves residents money, contains less mercury, and provides substantial energy saving (about 27%) over the existing kitchen fixtures.

We celebrated our success by participating in a worldwide “cut the carbon” party organized by Friends of the Earth (www.foe.org), 350.org (www.350.org), and other environmental groups. PCRA committee members and Back Bay Green Initiative partners toasted our accomplishment with champagne at our event “CFLs Shine in Boston High-Rise.” We joined tens of thousands of people in 188 countries holding simultaneous work parties from New Zealand to Nigeria, Mexico to Malta and beyond. On that day, all over the world, people planted trees, installed solar panels, cleaned beaches, bicycled, broke up pavement to create permeable surfaces, and released sea turtles at events designed to take back our planet.

For information about comprehensive energy efficiency services including rebates, incentives, and financing available for Back Bay owners, renters, and property managers call 617-635-7283 or visit NSTAR Electric and National Grid state and local energy efficiency websites (www.masssave.org for 5+ unit multi-family dwellings) and www.renewboston.org for 1-4 unit dwellings). For useful information about issues related to energy audits, see Back Bay Green Initiative website (www.bbgreeninitiative.com). You, too, can be part of this effort.