

New Light Bulbs Save Pollution and Major Dollars

By

Sonial Kowal

You don't have to install a wind turbine or solar panels on your roof to be green. Even small steps can make a big difference to the environment and to your condominium association's bottom line. The building in which my husband and I live has 7 units, most of which are not owner-occupied. This makes it especially challenging to undertake efficiency measures as the incentives to conserve heat and water are less compelling for tenants who aren't paying directly for their heat and water usage. Despite this, our self-managed condo association has been tackling the low-hanging fruit, saving thousands of dollars over the last 3 years.

For safety reasons, the hallways in our building are lit 24/7. Our communal areas were always hot and bulbs were forever blowing out, costing time and money to replace. In 2008, all 43 bulbs were replaced with warm light, compact fluorescent, candelabra bulbs at a bulk cost of \$3.40 each. Instantly, our electricity use dropped by two thirds, from 33kWh average daily use to 11kWh. The bulbs paid for themselves in two months! Although electricity costs have risen substantially over the last few years, our electricity bill is over \$1,000 less annually than it was before we replaced our bulbs, falling from an average of \$2,000 per year to \$766 in 2011. Another positive is that our hallways are much cooler than they were previously, so the cost of air conditioning in the units has also decreased. It must be stressed that compact fluorescent bulbs contain mercury which must be recycled responsibly. When they blow out, they can be brought to our neighborhood hardware stores in the Back Bay or Beacon Hill for recycling.

Another measure our condo association has undertaken is weather stripping doors to our units as well as outside doors to seal them better. We also regularly email tenants reminding them to use their programmable thermostats and to close their storm windows in the winter. The building is fitted with low flow faucets, showers, and toilets and we have a high efficiency communal washer and dryer. We also frequently monitor the building's water consumption on the Boston Water and Sewer Commission's website. When a faulty valve on a tenant's toilet caused it to run, the unreported problem was picked up by a quick glance at our water consumption, the cost of which had spiked by \$500 in two days.

Disappointingly, recycling is still a challenge in our building as well as on our street. Perhaps people don't feel they have the room in small units. That may have been the case with the old blue bins but single stream recycling in clear bags makes it easy. All you need is a large garbage can with two compartments – one for recycling and the other for general waste.