

Cutting utility costs is good for your bank account, and even better for the environment.



Saving Grace

By Lisa M. Starr

WHEN YOU EXAMINE YOUR MONTHLY FINANCIAL STATEMENT for ways to cut costs, do you ever zero in on utilities? If scrutinizing your water, sewer and electric bills makes your eyes glaze over, you're not alone. However, focusing some energy on energy can have a positive impact on your bottom line. True, you can't control the utility rates you have to pay, but you can examine varied and more cost-effective uses of these essential commodities.

Conserving Water

Less than 3% of the earth's water is fresh, and practicing effective water conservation can cut usage by as much as one third. Given these facts, it's no surprise that water conservation has become a pervasive issue worldwide. A spa

relies on water in a multitude of ways, so conserving this precious commodity is a key aspect of controlling a spa's utility costs.

Let's start with wet services. In recent years many spa equipment manufacturers have drawn upon modern conservation methods to give technicians new and innovative ways to provide wet treatments while minimizing waste. Brian Gay, CEO of Hydroco (www.hydroco.com), feels very strongly about water conservation and makes developing new technologies a priority. "Water is crucial to a spa, but we shouldn't encourage water waste," he insists. "There are many ways that spas can manage the use of water, impacting both the environment and the financial resources of the business."

Hydro tub alternatives. Although they're standard-bearer for spa treatments, hydrotherapy tubs can present some financial challenges for smaller businesses that may have trouble with extra considerations like hot and cold water supply lines, drain lines of adequate size and a comparable hot water heater.

The Dry Float Soft-Pack treatment bench from Austria-based Kurland Haslauer (www.haslauer.co.at) presents an interesting alternative. Not much larger than a standard treatment table, the bench requires only an electrical plug and provides the therapeutic benefits of water without permitting the client to actually make direct contact with the water. First, products chosen for use in the service are painted on the client. After being wrapped, she reclines on a platform that's lowered into the bench, leaving her floating in the water—albeit with a membrane preventing her from actually getting wet. The client experiences all of the benefits of hydrostatic pressure, along with that relaxing floating sensation. When the service is complete the platform is raised back up and the client exits. There's no need to drain, sanitize and refill a 60-gallon tub.

A new piece of equipment from Hydroco, the Suspense vertical flotation tank, conserves water



Hydroco's Suspense vertical flotation tank performs multiple functions, yet uses only 5 gallons of water per treatment.

usage while offering many different treatment options. The Suspense is a vertical chamber with clear sides. A client steps into an Aqualiner, a large polymer bag, and products such as muds or oils are applied to her skin. She enters the Suspense chamber, which is then filled with water from one of two adjacent tanks. The temperature of the water can be controlled and becomes a part of the service. This provides an environment for thermal transfer and compression therapy, while allowing the client to float, her head supported by a floating pillow.

The Suspense chamber is large enough to allow for clients to perform low-impact fitness exercises, deep-water running and aqua aerobics, making it ideal for rehabilitation purposes. Yet, it uses only about 5 gallons of water per treatment. The client may float in as much as 800 gallons, but that water is recirculated and reused.

Water-Saving Ways

Without investing in new or different equipment, there are still ways you can save enough water to have an impact on your finances. Look around your spa at the various ways that water is used, and consider the following options:

- Train technicians not to run the tap unnecessarily in treatment or prep rooms.
- Design protocols that enable you to reduce water usage, such as using fewer heads on the Vichy shower.
- Use towels instead of hot water to keep clients warm.
- Use timers so that technicians don't run over on water-based treatments.
- Use a hand-held shower to rinse clients, instead of a 9-head Vichy.
- Use hot towel cabinets so you can provide warm, moist towels for removing product.
- Don't leave the faucet running in salon basins if you're not actively rinsing hair.
- Fill used plastic bottles with water and float them in toilet tanks, limiting the amount of fresh water that's needed to fill the tank.
- Make sure that your plumbers have the correct water pressure coming into your facility, to give you more flexibility with flow.
- If your spa has outdoor space for which you're responsible, landscape with native plants that are adapted to your local climate and rainfall.



You can dramatically cut down on water usage with equipment like Kurland-Haslauer's Dry Float Soft-Pak, which offers the therapeutic benefits of water without direct client-to-water contact.

Operational uses. The average day spa does a voluminous amount of laundry, and the average washing machine uses over 30 gallons of water for each load. Replacing these machines with newer, front-loading machines can use up to 40% less water.

Your spa's restroom is another key area in which to conserve. In 1992, the National Energy Policy Act began to mandate the use of low-flow toilets, which use 1.6 gallons of water per flush, compared to the 3.5 gallons per flush used by a standard

is fully and properly loaded to maximize usage.

Water-free treatment options. Since most of the water usage during services comes during full-body treatments, one alternative is to offer some services using products that don't require rinsing to remove. Offers Kaz Smith, director of sales at Spa Elegance (www.spaelegance.com), "Wet-room equipment is popular with spas, but we're also seeing an increased demand for new treatments that don't require a shower, such as peel-off body masks. These treatments help owners avoid build-out

The average dishwasher uses almost 10 gallons of water per wash.

toilet. In a 2,000-square-foot, four-treatment-room spa with a moderate schedule, the use of low-flow toilets translates into almost 20,000 fewer gallons of water used per year. Low-flow faucet aerators used in showerheads can cut the flow of water from 4 - 5 gallons per minute to about 2.5 gallons per minute.

Finally, there's your break room and, possibly, kitchen area. The average dishwasher uses almost 10 gallons per wash, so the best energy- and money-saving strategy is to make sure that your dishwasher

expenses, and the need to buy extra water heaters and/or to dig up floors in existing buildings. They're also simple for the technician to perform, and clients often appreciate staying warm and dry during treatments."

For more general tips on saving water, see "Water-Saving Ways" on page 96.

Curbing Heating Costs

There are four ways to decrease your water heating expenses:

1. Use less hot water.
2. Turn down the thermostat on the hot water heater.
3. Purchase a more efficient water heater.
4. Insulate the heater.

Since short, lukewarm showers aren't what most clients are looking for, a spa owner's best options are items 3 and 4. If you already have a reasonably efficient model, you'll find that insulating your heater will help it keep the water warm without expending more energy. Be sure to insulate the first 6 feet of hot and cold pipes that are connected to the heater. Also, install heat traps where these pipes meet the heater to prevent heat from escaping. Just be careful not to cover the thermostat with insulation too!

If you have an unshaded, south-facing roof on your property, you might also consider installing a solar water heater. These systems can be designed to blend right in with the rest of your building, and can reduce the need for conventional water heating by one-third.



Energy-saving appliances such as the Energy Advantage Rigid-Mount Front-Load Washer (left) and Stack Washer/Dryer from Maytag's commercial laundry division save both space and money.

Lighting for Less

Clients expect a spa to be well lit, especially in the reception and retail areas, where there may be multiple lighting systems. Lighting usage probably comprises as much as 20% of your energy expenses; however, there are some new technologies that can substantially reduce your costs in this area.

Compact fluorescent lights, or CFLs, are more efficient than incandescent bulbs and last 4 to 10 times longer. They're more expensive than regular bulbs, but will pay for themselves in energy savings over their lifetimes. Charlie Slater, of Spa Central (www.spa-central.com) and Jewel Spa in Minneapolis, has used these bulbs and reports that although they cost three to four times more than a regular incandescent bulb, they last up to five years!

Some other ways to reduce your lighting bill:

- Train staff members to turn off lights in rooms that are not occupied, or install sensors.
- Use task lighting under counters or in particular areas as an alternative to lighting an entire room.
- Install dimmer switches on all of your lighting, especially in treatment and relaxation areas.
- If and when possible, take advantage of daylight in reception and retail areas.

Temperature Control

The bulk of your utility expense is most likely incurred from the high cost of keeping your spa at the right temperature. We have to be sensitive to the fact that clients are thinly dressed—if at all—while in the spa, so it can't be kept too cool. On the other hand, a too-warm treatment room is uncomfortable for the therapist. At Jewel Spa, Slater

uses table warming pads and electric blankets to heat the treatment tables. This allows both therapists and clients to be comfortable and will generally permit you to lower the ambient temperature by a couple of degrees.

You can also use programmable thermostats to turn heating and cooling functions down or up when the space isn't being used, such as at night or on days you're closed for business. Turning the thermostat up or down by 10 degrees for eight hours can save 10% to 15% on your bill each year.

If you live in a moderate climate, a heat pump can be a more efficient option, providing three times the heating power for its energy usage than do standard electrical heating systems. A heat pump is an air-conditioner that contains a



Compact fluorescent light bulbs last years longer than incandescent bulbs.

valve enabling the user to switch over to “heater” and back again. Rather than burn fuel, this system moves heat. Heat pumps need to have their filters changed monthly to be as efficient as possible.

With any heating and cooling system, there’s a network of ducts carrying air from the heating and cooling units to the vents in your facility. If the ducts aren’t properly insulated, there will be leaks between sections of the ducts. If your ductwork runs through unconditioned spaces, your system will have to work harder to maintain your ideal temperature due to heating or cooling the unused space around the leaks.

Saving in the Office

There are also some ways to save money on the power used by your office equipment. When purchasing items such as computers, monitors, copiers, printers and faxes, look for the Energy Star seal.

Conservation Sources

For more information on ways to save energy, visit the following websites:

www.aceee.org—American Council for Energy Efficient Economy, a 25-year-old organization that works to affect energy policy

www.eere.energy.gov—U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy site, providing comprehensive information to the public, along with hundreds of site links

www.eia.doe.gov—Energy Information Administration of the Dept. of Energy site, providing U.S. government statistics on all forms of energy usage

www.greenbiz.com—GreenBiz, a multiservice site focused on businesses and the environment

www.wateruseitwisely.com—A business-sponsored site that provides general information and source links regarding water savings

Energy Star is a government-backed program that helps businesses and individuals practice superior energy efficiency. For instance, an Energy Star certified computer uses 70% less electricity than regular computers by entering a low-power mode when left inactive. It may not seem like much, but in 2004, with the help of Energy Star-approved products, Americans saved enough energy to power 24 million homes and avoid greenhouse gas emissions equal to those from 20 million cars, all while saving \$10 billion in energy expenses.

Your staff's awareness of energy management options at the front desk and/or booking area can have an impact. The simplest thing for everyone to do is to turn off or unplug equipment that's not being used; most equipment continues to drain power as long as it's plugged in to an active socket. (In the average home, 75% of electricity used to power home appliances is used while the products are turned off!) This is especially true of laptops and

routers, whose adapters draw power continuously when plugged into the wall, even if the equipment isn't plugged in to the adapter.

One solution is to plug in items to a power strip that can then be shut down easily. Also, set up the power management features on your computers, allowing them to go into standby or hibernation mode from which they can be quickly awakened when needed. There's a common belief that screen savers conserve energy, but this isn't true. It's best to just turn off the monitor while leaving the computer running if you're going to be away from your desk for a period of time.

Your Savings Plan

It would be difficult to adopt *all* of the changes and practices mentioned in this article, but if you want to lower your energy and water expenses—and be more environmentally responsible—you can develop a sensible action plan that will positively impact

Let your clients know that you're trying to be more environmentally responsible.

your business. Here's an outline for a strategy:

- **Make the commitment.** Decide what's possible for your business that will also have an impact

on your bottom line. Commit to a plan for a minimum of six months, spanning some seasonal changes, to allow everyone time to develop new behaviors.

- **Get your staff on board.** Give your staff an idea of what's spent on utilities, and what the business stands to gain by reducing that figure. After your plan is underway for a month or so, ask them how it's working out and solicit more ideas for saving energy.
- **Install signs.** Friendly reminders about conserving water and turning off equipment posted in certain areas will help to jog everyone's memory.
- **Install equipment.** Act on your plans to change to low-flow toilets, aerated faucets and CFL lighting.
- **Monitor results.** Track the results of your actions. Are you really saving on energy or on water? Have there been other positive impacts to your efforts, such as just generally raising environmental consciousness?
- **Post the results of your efforts.** After a few months, you'll be able to see the savings in monthly bills, so don't wait too long to share this information. Your staff will be more likely to continue to participate if they feel their efforts are leading somewhere. You might even invite to share in the savings, if not through direct compensation, then perhaps with a fun party as a reward.

In addition to the financial gains, energy conservation is just the right thing to do. In fact, if you let your clients know that you're trying to be more environmentally responsible, they're likely to join you in your efforts, enabling you to help spread a healthy habit. ●

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