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Salix offers schools funding for energy efficiency

Alastair Keir, chief executive at Salix Finance, looks at how schools can reduce their environmental footprint by minimising energy use and the benefits that can be realised by those that do.

School energy bills could be reduced by up to 20% by introducing simple measures. UK schools spend an estimated £350 million on energy bills each year and could save around £20million of that through improved energy efficiency. However, the problem many school business and energy managers face is finding the up-front investment that is needed to become more energy efficient.

Paul Garrett, network and resource manager and school governor at Charles Darwin School in Biggin Hill, Kent, explains how a chance meeting with a boiler supplier showed the potential for savings.

"The boiler company was planning a case study in a school for its system. It approached me and explained there could be substantial savings in both money and carbon emissions. Unfortunately we couldn't afford the system at that time and couldn't take advantage of the opportunity."

This scenario won't be uncommon in schools across the country and recognising this dichotomy, the government has made available interest-free funding through Salix Finance.

Salix Finance is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which offers interest-free energy-efficiency loans to public sector organisations for around 100 different types of energy-efficiency equipment.

These range from building insulation, boiler and lighting upgrades to improved cooling systems and IT energy-efficiency improvements. The loans are designed to pay for themselves through the savings in energy – essentially providing free funding to tackle energy bills.

This is how Charles Darwin

School solved its funding problem and was able to install an innovative boiler which is expected to save around £2,700 per year.

Clearly if schools use less power, they will spend less money on energy bills. Not only that, but by reducing their carbon emissions and improving their environmental performance they will fare better in the government's Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC) programme which comes into force in April 2010. With schools included in the scheme under the responsibility of their local authority there is a clear financial incentive to reduce carbon emissions for both the local authority and the schools in the area.

Because of the way school budgetary arrangements are set up, Salix funding is usually managed within the relevant local authority. If a school's council has a recycling fund, the first port of call will generally be the energy manager. He may be able to identify eligible energy-efficient projects within a school and discuss how best to use the Salix fund to meet its needs.

Nottinghamshire County Council has taken advantage of interest-free funding from Salix Finance. It has implemented energy-saving projects ranging from heating controls, lighting upgrades, voltage optimisation, building fabric insulation and pipe insulation across its schools. For example, in Rushcliffe Comprehensive School it has upgraded the lighting, fitted flange and valve insulation in the boiler room and a building energy management system to the boilers.

According to Paul Eccleshare, the Council's principal energy offi-

cer: "Finding the funding has been the biggest challenge to becoming more energy efficient. It is difficult to justify the investment to implement measures that have been identified with other pressing priorities competing for funding.

"The beauty of the Salix Finance fund is that it is cost neutral. It is an enabling fund.

Nottinghamshire County Council match-funded the £500,000 Salix fund to implement changes and already stands to benefit from lifetime savings of 23,751 tonnes of CO₂ and more than £4 million. As the Salix fund can be reinvested, the council is now identifying additional projects to deliver further savings.

Often the simplest measures produce the biggest results, such as better insulation or new heating

systems. For example, The Friends School, a 300 year old independent school with more than 115 staff and 400 pupils spent around £8,500 a year heating its swimming pool. By purchasing a cover to reduce heat loss, it is saving more than £2,000 a year.

As well as the carbon and cost savings, any work undertaken to save energy can be incorporated into the curriculum and used as a teaching tool. Salix funding can also be used to support any work towards achieving EcoSchool status.

Making energy-efficient savings is an area that schools cannot afford to ignore. Managing carbon emissions will help schools to cut back on their energy costs and realise savings that could be spent on new books, PE equipment or even additional teaching staff.



A swimming pool cover saved £2,000 a year at The Friends School

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