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Rising UH energy bills inspire efficiency summit

By Diana Leone

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Over the past decade, the University of Hawaii's Manoa campus energy bills have risen 35 percent.

The projected gap between last year's bills and next year's is even wider -- 42 percent, said Kathy Cutshaw, interim vice chancellor for administration, finance and operations.

Since the Legislature refused to help UH cover the rising bills, the administration had to use student tuition payments to help, Cutshaw said.

"The sticker shock is kind of something that brings the issue to light," said Stephen Meder, an architecture professor who is among those working on ways to reduce campus energy use -- a lot.

Meder will be among presenters at a Chancellor's Energy Summit on Oct. 24.

Other speakers at the public event will include University of California energy managers, a local energy consultant and Hawaiian Electric Co. and UH energy experts.

UH-Manoa is the second-largest electricity consumer on Oahu, behind only the military. So there is hope that if it makes a go of reducing energy use, other government agencies and private companies will take notice, Cutshaw said.

While rising costs are the "big overarching impetus for the energy summit," Cutshaw said, "we are the institution of higher education here in the state -- and we should be a leader in energy conservation."

"It's about money, but it's also about doing the right thing," agreed Meder, who directs the Center for Smart Building and Community Design.

Interim UH-Manoa Chancellor Denise Konan is proposing a UH-Manoa Clean Energy Policy that calls for:

- » 30 percent reduction in campus energy use by 2012.
- » 50 percent reduction in campus energy use by 2015.
- » 25 percent of campus energy supplied by renewable sources by 2020.
- » Energy and water self-sufficiency for the campus by 2050.

The full policy should be posted this week on the campus Web site (<http://www.uhm.hawaii.edu/>) and to be discussed in campus meetings this fall, Cutshaw said.

Those are achievable goals, said Jim Dewey, energy manager for the University of California-Santa Barbara. His school has cut electrical use by 30 percent since 1998, he said.

And one reason nonuniversity folks might want to attend is that the concept of saving money with higher-efficiency cooling and lighting systems applies to everyone, Dewey said.

Miles Kubo, executive vice president of Honolulu-based Energy Industries LLC, said his message at the summit will be simple: The cost of installing higher-efficiency energy systems pays for itself -- fast.

Upcoming chances for UH to show itself a leader in green building design include the new dormitory to replace Freer Hall and the new Kapiolani Community College Culinary Institute of the Pacific, Meder said.

"We're at the end of the era of cheap oil," Meder said. And many things point to Hawaii becoming an energy leader, he said, including:

- » "One of the most comfortable climates in the world."
- » A 90 percent dependency on fossil fuels, 65 percent of which are foreign.
- » Rich renewable resources, including solar, wind, wave and bio-fuel power.
- » As an island, a potential "preview to what happens to rest of planet."

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII-MANOA UTILITY BILLS

2005: \$15 million

2006: \$17.9 million

2007: \$21.3 million -- projected

UH-MANOA CHANCELLOR'S ENERGY SUMMIT

Oct. 24, 8 a.m.-noon at Hawaii Imin International Conference

Center, Jefferson Hall, Keoni Auditorium, 1777 East-West Road.
For more information, contact Cindy Knapman, 956-7410.

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