

## Case study – TAFE Illawarra



# TAFE Illawarra proves every little bit counts

Never doubt the power of incremental savings.

The sustainability advocates at TAFE Illawarra were not sure how much electricity a single computer used when left on overnight. They discovered it was about 70 watts, similar to leaving on a light bulb. By itself this seems small, but multiplied by 3000 computers across 14 campuses every night of the week for a year...

Darren O'Connell, the Environmental Officer at TAFE Illawarra, says automatic shutdown of all computers at 10.30 pm each night reduces after-hours electricity use by up to 20 per cent and saves TAFE Illawarra more than \$50,000 a year.

'We tested the computer shutdown at Wollongong first and just for the weekend,' he says. 'We wanted to ensure the technology would work, it didn't cause problems for staff and it actually led to energy savings.'

'This is a no-cost option that has minimal impact – just some simple code in the server that tells the computers to shut down at 10.30 pm,' he added.

TAFE Illawarra is a large, high-profile organisation on the South Coast of NSW. It provides vocational education and training to about 34,000 students each year at campuses throughout the Illawarra, South Coast and Southern Highlands.

O'Connell explains that TAFE Illawarra takes a responsible approach to sustainability because it plays a large part in the lifestyles and work practices of many young people. ►

### In brief

Spread over 14 campuses and with 34,000 students, TAFE Illawarra is a sustainability leader. From Wollongong, south to the border and west to the Snowy Mountains, TAFE Illawarra has reduced its impact on our environment in the areas of waste, water and energy – with stunning results.

Apart from achieving behavioural change among staff and students – which TAFE Illawarra nominates as its major gain – a continuing focus on sustainable practices has allowed the Institute to:

- save 17 per cent on water and 10 per cent on electricity – a total saving of about \$140,000
- save \$50,000 a year in electricity costs by implementing an Institute-wide computer shutdown at 10.30 pm each night
- further cut water use by employing leak detection experts to find and rectify leaks in plumbing and infrastructure – a saving of 7000 litres a day or \$7600 per year.



- 'This is why we want to walk the talk,' he says. 'We are making sure our campuses are best practice, sustainable facilities. Our two roles are to educate people and manage the facilities where they learn. You cannot do one without the other. We can't teach and preach sustainability and be an energy-guzzling organisation.'

O'Connell says TAFE Illawarra joined the Sustainability Advantage Program to get independent, up-to-date, expert advice. TAFE Illawarra also wanted to build partnerships with government, qualify for funding assistance and learn from like-minded businesses.

'The idea of clusters and peer-to-peer sharing is important in this field because you want to know what other organisations are doing and what they have achieved,' says O'Connell. 'It was just a great way to get our environmental program under way,' he said.

Having already set a three-year environmental management plan with targets in energy, water and waste, TAFE Illawarra knew what it wanted to achieve.

TAFE Illawarra Director, Dianne Murray says: 'We took sustainability from the warm and fuzzy approach to something we have built into our organisational direction and business strategies. It is an important part of our operation; looking for efficiencies and savings in waste, water and energy.'

Extending the theme that every little bit counts, TAFE Illawarra also declared war on water leaks. Many organisations think they will save the most water by installing water-saving devices. This will help, but for any large organisation with older infrastructure the most effective measure is to stop leaks. Across a year, leakage can account for up to 50 per cent of an organisation's water use.

Online water monitoring made detecting leaks easier. TAFE Illawarra installed technology and brought in experts in leak detection at its Wollongong campus, which is the Institute's largest user of water.

'That was a real eye-opener for us,' says O'Connell. 'The Wollongong campus was leaking 10,000 litres of water a day. Rectifying the underground leaks and fixing faulty urinals and cisterns saved about 7000 litres a day. That's about \$7600 per annum – just from repairing leaks.'

Embracing the adage that you can't manage what you can't measure, TAFE Illawarra also started online electricity monitoring at most of its campuses.

'This gave us detailed information about what was happening after hours as well as during class times,' O'Connell says. 'Once we started to understand our electricity and water usage patterns we could make improvements. That was really effective.'

While savings in energy, water and money grab the headlines, TAFE Illawarra emphasises that the underlying benefit of its sustainability drive has been the changes in attitude and behaviour among staff and students.

'There is more than financial gain in doing the sustainable thing,' says O'Connell. 'It's as much about education and awareness. We did a staff survey and we asked people if they were aware TAFE Illawarra was trying to save energy, and had they changed their behaviour. More than 80 per cent said yes to both. That is a great result.'

### Your next step

To find out how your business can join the Sustainability Advantage Program, contact the team:

**Email** [sustainbus@environment.nsw.gov.au](mailto:sustainbus@environment.nsw.gov.au)  
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