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Renovations lead campaign to save energy on campus

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UT announced the beginning of a major initiative to reduce campus energy consumption by 20 percent by the year 2020 at the Thompson Conference Center on Monday.

The UTakeCharge campaign is the name given to the demand-side energy management and conservation program created when Pat Clubb, vice president of Employee and Campus Services, signed an energy-reduction charter in March 2007.

Alfred Lewandowski, manager of the program for Facilities Services, said there has been a 22-percent increase in energy consumption at UT since 2000.

The UT System Board of Regents awarded \$16 million for the initial phase of the plan, which will include a series of renovation projects on University facilities and a campaign to change student, faculty and staff behavior regarding energy usage.

The 20 percent reduction is intended to decrease the actual amount of energy used and not for fiscal savings for the University, said William Lucas, associate director of Facilities Maintenance.

Clubb said the initial cost of the renovations will ideally be offset by savings from the energy costs.

"As you decrease the use of natural gas the energy savings will pay the debt service for the bonds," Clubb said.

Lucas said it will take six years to pay back the initial costs.

Estimated savings from the renovation projects are expected to exceed \$2 million, according to the UTakeCharge Web site.

The first step will be to find contractors to implement the facility renovations, Lewandowski said.

The initial renovations are expected to take 18 months to two years to complete and will focus on a light retrofitting program, steam usage and water conservation. The renovations will occur in all the academic and faculty buildings on campus.

Clubb said one of the major challenges will be to minimize disruption in classes as the renovations are undertaken in the academic buildings.

The UTakeCharge group was less specific about the plan to change the behavior of students and faculty on campus.

"I don't know that we have a specific plan for behavior change," Lucas said.

Student Government Vice President Nicole Trinh stressed the importance of communicating to the student body the link between UT's energy costs and the cost of attendance.

"Students need to recognize the correlation between their actions on energy consumption and how that translates to the dollars they pay for tuition," Trinh said.

After a major budget shortfall partially caused by a spike in natural gas prices in 2005, a \$150 utility fee was added to the 2006-2007 tuition and was reduced to \$50 for the 2007-2008 school year, despite an overall increase in tuition.

Trinh said SG is reaching out to the student body through the Campus Environmental Center's programs as well as supporting facility services.

The center is currently conducting the "Doing it in the Dark" month-long residence hall energy challenge.

SG is also considering proposals to add classes on environmental sustainability to the UT curriculum.

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