

Here we are in the middle of another winter. The big holiday rush is over and business has probably slowed down a little bit. Wondering what to do with all that spare time? How about making a couple of simple but clever lighting upgrades? The trip to the hardware store is a great excuse to get out of the kitchen and the money saved on the energy bill will help to ease those winter blues! So, let's go...

An Investment You Can't Beat

By now, everyone in California is familiar with compact fluorescent lamps. (We energy buffs call them CFLs.) These little screw-in wonders are saving Californians big bucks on their energy bills and while many restaurateurs have already installed some CFLs, most have not taken full advantage of this technology. What's the hold up? Perhaps it's that \$6 to \$12 capital cost per lamp? Well here's the scoop – the high cost of energy coupled with long restaurant operating hours means that most of those lamps are paid for in less than 4 months. That's a very good annual return on your money – certainly better than your 401K!

The Best Application - Low Risk and High Return

Let's start out by playing it safe and installing our CFLs in a couple of places where the operating hours are the highest (more hours equal a bigger payback) and the aesthetic issues are minimal, meaning the customers will never see these lamps. We're talking about walk-ins and exhaust hoods – two places where the lights are always ON. We'll begin with the exhaust hood. Our example hood has four 75 watt light bulbs that are on from 8 am to midnight or 16 hours a day. These light bulbs are cheap to buy but are a pain because they are always burning out. They are also very inefficient. We will replace them with four warm-colors (2800K), 23 watt, Energy Star® rated CFLs that we got at the local big-box hardware store. These lamps will be installed in a hot environment so we sprung for the high-quality \$12 models. We know that we can put these in the hood because on the box it says "Approved for Totally Enclosed Fixture". Ouch, that's \$50 for four lamps – is it worth it? You bet! The CFLs will pay for themselves in 14 weeks and by the end of the year we will pocket \$130 in energy savings! These CFLs will also last for 10,000 hours, which means we won't need to change them for almost two years, and because we used the same warm color as the old light bulbs, the kitchen staff will never even notice the difference.

Now let's move on to the walk-ins. While we were at the hardware store, we picked up two extra \$12 lamps because we noticed on the back of the box that they will work at very low temperatures like -22°F. Those will go in our freezer. We also grabbed a couple of the lower cost \$8 lamps for our refrigerator. We still made sure they were Energy Star but we didn't care about the lower temperature rating. Once again, we are replacing 75 watt light bulbs that burn for 16 hours a day. Worth the \$40 investment? Yes, we will break even in 12 weeks and keep an extra \$140 by year's end.

On the way out of the hardware store, we noticed some \$6, 14 watt, Energy Star CFLs and we bought four of those on impulse figuring we'd use them for something. Back at the restaurant we decide to park those in our storeroom – another place where the lights never get turned off. We will replace four 60 watt light bulbs, break even in 8 weeks and pocket \$140 extra dollars.

Let's tally it all up. For an initial investment of about \$112 and a quick drive to the hardware store, we finished up the year \$400 richer and all we had to do was screw in a dozen CFLs. Not bad, especially when you consider that we'll get the same or better light output and our new lamps won't irritate us by burning out all the time!

One Thing to Remember

Don't buy the cheap CFLs - if the price seems too good, then it is. The cheapies will still save energy but they often fail early. Look for Energy Star rated lamps and when in doubt, ask the clerks which brands get returned most often and which get returned least often.

More to Come

This time we played it safe and put our CFLs in the back of the house where looks don't really matter too much. Next time we'll get a little bolder and move into the front of the house, where style counts!

These energy saving tips are offered by the Food Service Technology Center (FSTC), an unbiased food service resource center located in San Ramon, CA and funded by California utility ratepayers under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission. For more information on the FSTC and for our schedule of free energy efficiency seminars, please visit our website at www.Fishnick.com.