

# Turn on the Savings by Controlling Outdoor Lighting

Spring is here! The days are now officially longer than the nights and everyone has an itch to get outdoors and enjoy the weather. It's the perfect time to step outside and have a look at your outdoor lighting systems. Why? Because outdoor lighting is expensive! The combination of multiple, high-wattage lamps and California electricity prices make these energy guzzlers worth your special attention. In fact mistakes in outdoor lighting control can potentially waste your money faster than any other system in your restaurant. Let's look at some practical ways to control your lights and protect your profits.

## **Make sure that your lights are never on in the daylight:**

- If you don't have any lighting controls, then you must rely on your staff to turn the lights off at dawn and on at dusk. Usually, they are more concerned with food production during those times so, unless you have very good management oversight, this method is not recommended. One restaurant visited by energy surveyors was spending over \$5,000 a year on decorative and security lights that were on all day long because nobody was told to turn them off.
- If your lights are controlled by a time clock, then you must regularly reset that clock as the seasons change. Once again, the pressures of food production tend to overshadow the desire to program the time clock. Result? In the middle of the summer you will have lights that come on hours early because the time clock is set for the middle of the winter. One solution is to use a photocell with that time clock. The photocell senses the light levels and controls the lights accordingly. Just be aware that photocells can and do fail, so keep an eye on those lights and make sure they come on at the right time. Also, make sure to mount that photocell so it has a good view of the sky.
- Another simple and elegant way to control outdoor lights is with an astronomical time clock. Once set, these devices adjust themselves daily to correct for the ever-changing length of day and night and they don't need a photocell. Astronomical time clocks are perfect for food service because you set them once and forget about them!

## **Only turn outdoor lights on when you really need them:**

- Schedule your outdoor lighting so that individual lighting groups turn on and off independent of each other. For instance, you want to turn off your signage and take-out menu boards at closing time but leave on the parking lot lighting until all of the customers and employees are gone. Once everyone is gone, you can switch off everything except your required security lighting. This kind of fine-tuning can save big dollars. A quick service restaurant saved over \$3,500 a year by splitting their 14 parking lots into two circuits and turning off 8 of those lights at closing time. They saved an additional \$1,000 a year by turning off those last 6 lights during the three hours when the restaurant was empty. This type of flexibility requires a more advanced lighting panel or energy management system but the payback can be well worth it. An energy management system or other computer controlled lighting panel will also allow you to program in the opening and closing schedule for each day of the week, creating even more savings.

## **Install more efficient lamps wherever possible:**

- It's easy to do an energy efficiency upgrade on the many small outdoor lights on a restaurant. This includes replacing screw-in flood lamps with compact fluorescent flood lamps and replacing quartz halogen security fixtures with compact fluorescent security fixtures. You should also replace regular light bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps in small outdoor fixtures. Replacing a single light bulb will save you about \$25 a year for a payback that is less than 6 months. That's a pretty good investment! In every case, just make sure that the lamps are rated for outdoor use and choose lamps that are Energy Star® approved.

*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](http://www.Fishnick.com).*