

PAIN RELIEF FOR ENERGY BILLS

At the present time, there seems no end to energy price hikes but, just because you're paying more per unit, that doesn't mean your bills have to go up accordingly! The key is to cut your energy usage – and you're probably very tired of hearing that. But don't turn the page just yet. This interview with Julian Grant from Chauvin Arnoux UK, might just provide you with some fresh ideas.



EM: For months now we've been hearing stories about organisations of all kinds struggling to cope with massive increases in energy bills, and this certainly doesn't look as if it's a problem that will go away anytime soon. We've also been subjected to what seems like an endless barrage of suggestions about ways of keeping energy costs under control. Do you have anything new to add?

JG: Maybe I do – but before I get to that, the first thing I want to say is that it would be wrong to dismiss that 'endless barrage of suggestions' out of hand. Many of them – installing extra insulation, changing to LED light bulbs and so on – make a lot of sense so they should be considered very carefully. I have to agree though that they're hardly novel. Actually, my top tip for tackling energy issues is to go for a walk.

EM: Go for a walk?! In the hope that inspiration will strike while you're away from your desk, I suppose, which doesn't seem particularly proactive!

JG: That wasn't quite what I had in mind. My idea is to go for a walk around your building out of hours – in the evening after everyone has gone home and at the weekend when the building is closed. How many lights have been left on? How many machines or items of office equipment are still running? You may have quite a surprise – unnecessary out-of-hours usage is still one of the most significant ways organisations waste energy. Usually it's pretty easy to fix – time switches are very inexpensive!

EM: That's great but not everyone wants to spend their evenings and weekends wandering round buildings looking for energy wastage. Is there another way?

JG: There is, and although it involves a modest amount of expenditure, it brings a lot of additional benefits. It's to use a portable energy logger (PEL). You can hook up a PEL to any circuit in your building and leave it in place to record energy usage – and a lot more information – even when you're not there. Actually, it will tell you much more than just which lights or which machines have been left on unnecessarily. It will tell you exactly where energy is being used in your organisation and when as well as providing information about things like harmonics, voltage imbalance and poor power factor that could be costing you a lot of money. Armed with this information, you'll know exactly where savings are most likely to be possible.

EM: But many people have already carried out energy surveys with a PEL and put energy saving measures in place as a result. What do you say to them?

JG: I say they should do it again! OK, realistically, if they've used a PEL to carry out an energy survey in the last few weeks, there really isn't much reason to do it again immediately but, if it's been a few months, I strongly recommend repeating it. For one thing, as seasons change, so does energy usage. A survey carried out in the summer may not reveal problems that would be immediately apparent in a winter survey. That's not all. Installations change as well. Additional equipment may have been added, or old equipment may have been disconnected resulting in an unbalanced load on a three-phase supply. Maybe new equipment is generating a lot of harmonics or has adversely affected the power factor. Maybe equipment has become defective

and is producing more harmonics than it should. None of these things is obvious without making measurements but all can make a big difference to the energy bill.

EM: Are you saying that energy surveys should be considered as routine operations that are repeated at regular intervals?

JG: That's exactly what I'm saying. As I've already mentioned, a lot can change in a few months and a walk round the plant, though undoubtedly useful as a first step, can only tell you so much. Measurements will provide more complete information on which you can base sound decisions. Even if the measurements confirm that nothing much has changed, don't forget that it could still be worthwhile reviewing those decisions because one thing that definitely has changed is the price of energy. That means energy-saving measures that looked uneconomic a few months ago may now be much more attractive and have a relatively short payback time.

EM: There's definitely food for thought there. Do you have any closing words of advice?

JG: Only to keep on looking for opportunities to save energy and to reduce energy wastage. These are not do-it-once-and-forget tasks. Regular attention is the best way to relieve the pain of huge energy bills while doing your organisation and our planet a big favour. Also, it's worth bearing in mind that information is power – quite literally in this instance – so investing in a PEL that will provide you with accurate and reliable information about your energy usage has to be money well spent. www.chauvin-arnoux.co.uk

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