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Energy Efficient: UD's Free Audits Save Companies Money and Conserve Energy

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The University of Dayton

ENERGY EFFICIENT: UD'S FREE AUDITS
SAVE COMPANIES MONEY AND CONSERVE ENERGY

News Release

DAYTON, Ohio, February 2, 1988--For the past seven years, a University of Dayton mechanical engineering professor and his students have inspected energy use at factories and foundries around the tri-state area, quietly helping small- and medium-sized manufacturing companies stockpile \$7 million in energy savings.

But they wish they could help even more companies reduce their utility bills through in-house energy-saving programs.

Despite the successful track record of UD's energy audit program -- a free, no-strings-attached energy conservation assistance program subsidized by the federal government -- the phone is not ringing off the hook with requests. Throughout its existence, the program has battled something of an image problem.

"Even though I'm able to save companies money, anything free is suspicious -- especially from the U.S. government," explained Henry N. Chuang, a mechanical engineering professor who serves as the director of the Ohio Energy Analysis and Diagnostic Center at UD.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy and managed by the University City Science Center in Philadelphia, UD's program is one of only 13 in the country. It offers free consultation to companies within a 150-mile radius of Dayton. Since the program's inception at UD in 1981, Chuang and his students have been invited to inspect operations at 256 plants, mostly around the Dayton, Cincinnati and Columbus areas.

"Where we win or lose the battle is in the first five minutes of our visit to a plant," Chuang said. "We have to establish a certain confidence level. I don't wear a tie because I want to establish a relationship with the equipment operators and the foreman."

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Chuang said he and the student project engineers "roll up their sleeves" and review the company's utility bills, its insulation/weatherstripping efforts, the equipment's operating efficiency and all manufacturing processes. Their recommendations are presented in a bound, confidential report that Chuang composes on a word processor in his office.

"This is not a paper study," Chuang said. "We're actually able to save people money."

Based on a survey of the companies inspected, Chuang estimates that between 60 and 75 percent of their recommendations are implemented for cost savings ranging anywhere from "several thousand dollars to \$180,000" per company.

"Most companies don't have any idea what they're paying for," Chuang said. "We performed an energy audit for one company that received a \$13,000 refund for a mistake we caught on a utility bill."

Chuang is enlisting the help of area congressmen and the media to spread the word about UD's free energy audits. The service is offered to manufacturers that post annual sales of \$50 million or less, consume energy at the annual rate of between \$30,000 and \$1.5 million, employ 500 persons or less and do not have an in-house energy expert.

While Chuang is interested in helping manufacturing businesses improve their profit margin, he is more concerned about training tomorrow's energy experts. Of the 17 students who have participated in the program, at least three are employed now as energy management specialists in the private sector.

"Through this program, we're training our future energy leaders," Chuang said. "We're going to have them ready for the next energy crisis."

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To schedule an interview, contact Henry Chuang at (513) 229-2997 (office) or (513) 434-7890. He resides at 5361 Red Coach Rd. in Centerville, Ohio.