

Hybrid heating system is like a hybrid car—you can switch from gas to electricity

Whistler hotels cut gas emissions and energy costs

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Priyan (PJ) Jayetileke at the Four Seasons Whistler

WHISTLER, BC—When Priyan (PJ) Jayetileke, director of engineering with Four Seasons compared costs for the Four Seasons Vancouver and Four Seasons Whistler, he found that energy bills for the Whistler property were \$300,000 to \$600,000 more than those of Vancouver — for hotels comparable in size and facilities. The difference was that Whis-

ler used propane gas, rather than natural gas available in Vancouver.

Switching to energy sources other than propane became a top priority. Two other properties in Whistler that were already using a hybrid heating system to substitute electricity for propane reported huge savings.

Jayetileke did his due diligence. "I went there and didn't believe they could save that much. I talked to the plant engineers and the general managers — they had to convince me that this was a good way to go."

When he did the math, he found that the Four Seasons had the potential to save \$250,000 per year by using hybrid heating. An analogy by Malcolm Metcalfe of Sempa Hybrid Heating, the company that had implemented the system at the two resort properties helped him explain the process to the home office staff. "It's like a hybrid car," he told them. "You can switch from gas to electricity."

After selling head office, plus the various stakeholders in the residential part of the development, Jayetileke worked with Sempa to install two electrical boilers at a cost of \$380,000. The boilers were custom made, designed to switch between energy sources down to a tolerance of 2 kilowatts. The projected payback was 3.2 years, but Four Seasons Whistler has beaten that figure. Between June 2006 and May 2007, the hotel saved \$250,741, displacing 887.3 tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the equivalent of taking 153 Honda Accord sedans off the road for almost four million kilometers of driving.

"Hotels are good candidates for this type of heating because they have pools and hot tubs and common areas," Jayetileke said. The residential portion of the development has also saved money — an additional \$25,163 in the six months between Dec. 2006 and May 2007, the equivalent of taking 44 cars off the road.

"It's a great system — you'll definitely get your money back if you run it properly. I think it's the future of all new construction and properties."

Initial skepticism

Four Seasons was not the first Whistler company to install the Sempa hybrid heating system. Four years ago, when Metcalfe first approached a strata condo company managed by Intrawest with his idea of monitoring energy use and using off-peak electricity to displace expensive fossil fuels, the company was skeptical. But when they hired BC Research, an engineering company, to look into the idea, they said it was a good opportunity, and that the company should go for it.

Once Metcalfe's company, had implemented the system at that strata company and one of Intrawest's ski lodges, Intrawest was firmly on board. And when they won the AWARE award for environmental excellence a year and a half ago, that really started the ball rolling.

Four Seasons Whistler bought into the concept, as did Westin, Delta and Lodging Ovations properties. To date, these properties have net energy savings of more than \$1 million per year, which translates into a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of six per cent, using 2003 as a base year. This translates into a reduction of over 2,360 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and energy savings of 23,613 gigajoules to date.

In 2003, the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) recognized the need to improve energy efficiency and reduce emissions output in the community of 9,500 dwellings. Commercial hotels and Whistler-Blackcomb mountain operators were facing significant energy costs, with their tanked propane supply system and high infrastructure costs for the upcoming 2010 Olympics.

Through the use of hybrid heating, virtually all the major Whistler hotels have met RMOW's mandate and are now on track to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 14 per cent in time for the 2010 Olympics.

Sempa looks at its targets in the following order: first, save money; second, save greenhouse gas emissions; and third, save energy.

"When you look at it this way, you get different answers," Metcalfe told CLN in an interview last month. "The key is to use energy smartly. For example, if you have available solar energy you can use less natural gas to heat your building. You may actually use more energy, but there is less impact on the environment."

Whistler was an ideal place to implement hybrid heating because "it was a small community with high energy costs thanks to outdoor pools and hot tubs open year round, and a climate that is colder than Vancouver's. They burn propane, which is more expensive than natural gas."

Basically, the participants are using electricity in off peak hours to replace propane and natural gas. In BC, the trick is to keep your electricity use lower than the established monthly peak. For example, Whistler hotels are very busy on winter weekends, and might have their peak energy use at dinner on Saturday night.

In Alberta and Ontario, where the electricity rate floats, you can use energy very cheaply at night, said Metcalfe.

"We do well in hotels because they have a large night time heating load. Laundries use heat during the summer and that helps a huge amount. Our best targets are resort hotels, hotels and hospitals," Metcalfe added.

Typical costs of getting the system up and running for a larger hotel would be about \$500,000, with annual savings of about \$250,000. "We try to keep the payback under three years, and our average payback is 2.8 years," said Metcalfe.

There can be public relations benefits to lowering emissions as well. One hotel plans to produce a pillow case that says, "while you slept, we reduced our greenhouse gas emissions."

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