

Shoppers presented with energy-saving light bulbs

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ABU DHABI // Shoppers at Marina Mall were given free energy-saving light bulbs over the weekend as part of an educational campaign to improve the UAE's environmental record.

Some 40,000 of the light bulbs will be given out as part of the Heroes of the UAE campaign, an initiative of the Emirates Wildlife Society in association with the World Wide Fund for Nature (EWS-WWF) and the Environment Agency-Abu Dhabi.

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFL) use four times less power than traditional incandescent bulbs, and last 10 times longer.

“If all 40,000 energy-saving bulbs replace existing traditional light bulbs, the potential carbon dioxide emission savings resulting from the promotion will be equivalent to taking 2,000 cars off the road,” said Razan al Mubarak, the managing director of EWS-WWF.

The UAE is the fifth highest per capita energy consumer in the world, with the average resident using seven times the global average.

Some of this is explained by the country's large air-conditioning needs, justifiable in the hot summer months. However, much of that consumption goes to waste, said Ms al Mubarak, who estimated that, on average, 20 per cent of the energy consumed in households is wasted.

She said that lighting accounts for almost 10 per cent of household energy consumption and that switching to efficient bulbs would cut Dh800 (US\$215) per year off the electricity bill for an average two-bedroom flat.

Two energy-efficient alternatives to traditional light bulbs are available: CFLs and light-emitting diode (LED) bulbs.

While they offer high efficiency, CFLs contain mercury and need to be handled with care; if one is broken, people are advised to open windows for 15 minutes, collect the remnants with a wet rag and dispose of them separately from general household waste.

Light-emitting diode bulbs (LED) have been in use for decades in digital clocks and similar applications. They contain no mercury and are 20 to 50 times more efficient than traditional bulbs. They are, however, more expensive.

The Heroes campaign started in February with the aim of convincing people to reduce their energy consumption.

The weekend giveaway, sponsored by the Abu Dhabi Water and Electricity Authority, started on Friday, when more than 6,000 energy-efficient bulbs were distributed. It will finish next weekend.

Organisers are also asking participants to sign pledges to reduce their electricity consumption.

Each pledge form lists energy saving steps such as turning up the thermostat by two degrees Celsius, avoiding the use of a dryer after washing one's hands and regularly defrosting freezers to improve efficiency.

One of those pledging to reduce his energy use was Dr Azim Akbar, an expatriate from Pakistan who works for an oil company.

"Because of my job, I am quite conscious of the need for energy savings," he said. "But it is good to be reminded, and I am sure that most people in the UAE are not aware."

Ms al Mubarak said the campaign will continue with initiatives for schools and businesses.

In addition, the organisation is looking for volunteer households to help it refine its understanding of how simple measures can affect overall energy consumption in the home.

Participants will be asked to provide information from their electricity bills and implement energy-saving measures. The campaign's co-ordinators will measure what effect the measures are having and present the case studies to government departments for consideration of future policies.

"The public sector also has a role in helping reduce electricity consumption," said Ms al Mubarak. "It is an important question: How do we get the Government to influence things happening on the ground?"

(by Vesela Todorova -The National)