

Coburn Amendment 1868 - Encourages federal employees to help reduce energy use and costs by reminding them to turn off the lights and other electrical appliances not in use when leaving the office at the end of the day.

This amendment would essentially remind federal employees to remember to turn off the lights at the end of the day when they leave the office.

Specifically the amendment directs the Secretary of Energy to issue guidelines to all federal agencies to reduce energy costs by requiring federal employees to turn off the lights and other devices that consume energy when they are not being used.

These guidelines apply to the use of lights and devices in individuals' work places, not lights or devices intended for safety or security which obviously are in use even when an area is unoccupied by an employee.

The U.S. government is the largest energy consumer in the country. Despite a growing number of energy efficiency projects by multiple agencies and departments energy spending by the federal government has increased to more than \$20 billion a year. Approximately \$7 billion is spent to light, heat and cool federal buildings.¹

Since March 2011, members of my staff have conducted periodic checks on a number of federal government buildings in the evening and on weekends and have noted that many office lights remain on long after regular work hours. These include the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, Agriculture, EPA, and others.²

One specific example of wasted electricity is the EPA buildings in the Crystal City area of Arlington, Virginia. These EPA building were designed to "promote energy and water efficiency."³ Yet, numerous checks by my staff after regular working hours found the building nearly entirely lighted, even on weekend evenings and late nights.

To its credit, the Department of Energy (DOE) is the one building where the vast majority of lights appeared to be turned off after regular work hours.

However, the DOE Inspector General (IG) recently found the Department of Energy still "spends nearly \$300 million per year in energy costs for its 9,000 buildings at 24 sites. Electricity costs, totaling \$190 million, account for close to two-thirds of the Department's total energy expenditures, with roughly 40 percent or \$76 million of those costs attributable to the cost of

¹ Andy Medici, "Turn off the lights! Feds' \$7B power bill in cross hairs," Federal Times, November 13, 2011; <http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20111113/FACILITIES01/111130301/>.

² Periodic checks by the staff of Senator Tom Coburn from March 2011 to the present.

³ "EPA Facilities - Arlington, Virginia - Potomac Yard; Two of EPA's Headquarters Facilities," EPA website, accessed September 11, 2013; http://www.epa.gov/oaintmnt/facilities/hq_nova.htm.

lighting.”⁴ DOE could save over \$2.2 million in electric utility operating costs annually, equating to the amount of electricity used to power over 3,200 homes per year, by simply turning off the lights and using more efficient technology, according to the IG.⁵

The DOE is designated as the lead federal agency to coordinate energy efficiency efforts for all federal agencies. This amendment would encourage DOE to make the federal government lead by example by reducing unnecessary energy use with some of the most simple and commonsense advice we have all heard from our own mothers—to turn off the lights.

While upgrading buildings to reduce energy saves money in the long run it still costs money to do. There is no additional cost to anyone, however, for remembering to turn off the lights in a room or office that is not being used.



Nearly all the lights are on at this EPA building in Arlington, Virginia, on January 23, 2011—a Sunday night.

⁴ “Audit Report: The Department of Energy's Opportunity for Energy Savings Through Improved Management of Facility Lighting,” U.S. Department of Energy Office of Inspector General Office of Audit Services, June 2010; <http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/igprod/documents/IG-0835.pdf> .

⁵ Matthew L. Wald, “Energy Department Lags in Saving Energy,” The New York Times, July 7, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/08/science/earth/08efficient.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss .



This amendment restates the good advice of mothers to remember to turn off the lights when leaving a room.