

by PHIL OSBORN
Former Head of Energy at Sainsbury's



Career in Energy Management

The Energy Managers Association aims to encourage and enable more professionals to enter the world of energy management and environmental roles. Being an energy manager may not seem like the most obvious career for many. The EMA has taken on a challenge of changing the perception of energy management, by raising the sector's profile and sharing its members' – leading energy managers – insights into their career progress and achievements. In this issue, we have asked Phil Osborn about his career and views.

When did you first hear the term 'energy management'?

It wasn't until I started working in the NHS that I heard the term 'energy management' although I have always been aware of the need to be energy efficient. This came about from growing up in the era of the 3-day week and regular power cuts.

My first career was as an Engineering Officer in the Merchant Navy and, although I left the role over 30 years ago, I still consider myself a seafarer. We were always looking for ways to burn less fuel, and it just seemed like it was part of our DNA. One of the strangest fuel-saving ventures was a trial to see how slow the supertanker could travel without it losing the ability to steer safely. It was slow, and there was nothing as boring as seeing the same island on the horizon at the start and end of the watch.

It was in the NHS though where I started to get more interested in energy management, and I had the great pleasure to work with some specialist engineers across the Regional Health Authority.

“WE WERE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR WAYS TO BURN LESS FUEL AND IT JUST SEEMED LIKE IT WAS PART OF OUR DNA.”

We started to look at energy saving projects for the laundry that was on site. The Regional Health Authority had a fund for energy saving that was lent to hospital units with the loan being repaid through cost savings achieved. We installed flash steam recovery vessels, hot water recovery and tumble drier heat recovery systems, and this was the point when I got hooked on seeing energy usage fall.

After a couple of years in the NHS, I moved to the District Works Office to concentrate on specialist engineering areas and part of the role was energy management.

The time spent in this role made me want to become a specialist energy manager. I was lucky to work with some great people and was involved in capital installations and colleague awareness programmes, which set me up nicely for my first Energy Manager role for Abbey National Building Society.

This was the late 80's and it's worth reminding you that computers were

not that readily available. I was only the 3rd person on our office floor of about 300 people to be given a computer so I thought it wise to get some energy monitoring and targeting software – I was in my element.... numbers and graphs!

How did you progress through the profession?

Energy Management was starting to be taken seriously by organisations, and the number of Energy Managers grew over the years.

The privatisation of the electricity industry and the ability to negotiate contracts with suppliers from 1990 gave a new area of expertise for the aspiring energy manager – procurement.

At that time, most purchasing departments did not seem that interested in negotiating energy contracts and generally left it to the Energy Manager who understood what a kilowatt-hour was. In addition, we saw the birth of half hourly metered data and what a boon that was. We could now see what was happening on our sites across the 24-hour period and in particular, how much

“I WAS IN MY ELEMENT... NUMBERS AND GRAPHS!!”

electricity was being used outside of normal working hours. To my mind, this was the most useful tool for energy management especially across large organisations. It was a great period for Energy Managers; however, the electricity privatisation

also had a negative impact on the new Energy Management industry with several energy managers being made redundant and organisations concentrating efforts on buying better rather than using energy more efficiently. My role changed within Abbey National, and I moved into Facilities Management for a period but it wasn't long until I was back managing energy, albeit with additional non-energy responsibilities.

I was then offered an opportunity with a major property company, Land Securities, and found another aspect to energy management that I had not previously encountered – tenant recharging. In most cases, tenants had electricity supplied direct from the landlord, supply that had to be recharged to the tenant.

It was around this stage of my career that I started to take an interest in government energy policy and how it can impact larger organisations. I played an active part in the British Property Federation and had access to appropriate government departments. This was continued in my final role before retirement when I became Head of Energy for Sainsbury's, managing the enormous amount of energy they used. Through both the British Retail Consortium and the CBI, I was able to communicate issues with existing and proposed energy legislation.

What is your biggest achievement to date?

I have thought long and hard about this and rather than give my biggest achievement, I am listing my most memorable achievements over the years. Back in 1998, the electricity supply industry became fully open for all commercial buildings, which would have been fraught with issues for Abbey National had they continued paying bills at individual branches. I successfully proposed the centralising of the

bill payment process and set up a dedicated energy management team responsible for all energy billing and procurement issues. I was proud to bring 3 people into the team

“ I WAS PROUD TO BRING 3 PEOPLE INTO THE TEAM AND INTRODUCE THEM TO THE ENERGY INDUSTRY AND CREATE A REALLY GOOD AWARD WINNING TEAM.”

and introduce them to the energy industry and create a really good award winning team.

In a similar fashion I created a new team at Land Securities dedicated to managing energy and to bring its associated tenant billing process back in house.

Finally, I am very proud of the work of the team at Sainsbury's, building

“ MY KEY BIT OF ADVICE THAT I WOULD GIVE SOMEONE WISHING TO JOIN THE INDUSTRY WOULD BE TO VISIT ENERGY EXHIBITIONS, ATTEND ENERGY SEMINARS AND NETWORK WITHIN THE INDUSTRY.”

on the work undertaken by the team and the previous Energy Managers. In particular, the capital investment work was ramped up significantly once we had agreed the LED lighting specification and trials. Over the 4-year period, the energy team saved the business tens of millions of pounds and to this day I am extremely proud of that fine team.

What advice would you give to someone looking to become an energy manager?

We desperately need quality energy managers to drive forward the energy efficiency agenda and let's face it; we don't have a great deal left for future generations. So, how to become an energy manager? There are now several courses available where you can become an

energy specialist, certainly at post graduate level but it is likely that most potential energy managers are people looking to move into the industry. There are some superb organisations available that can help you achieve this, such as the Energy Institute and of course the EMA, which was set up on the basis that we need Energy Managers.

My key bit of advice that I would give someone wishing to join the industry would be to visit energy exhibitions, attend energy seminars and network within the industry.

You'll find loads of people willing to help you in your journey. You may also spot old geezers like me who, although retired, love the industry and still keep in touch.

What key areas should a successful energy manager concentrate on?

A successful energy manager needs the support from so many people around the business, from facilities managers to operational shift leaders. All will be able to play a part in reducing energy so one of the qualities needed is to be able to effectively communicate to all levels of the business.

One of the best friends you can have in your company will be an accountant. If you can make the accountant understand how energy and money can be saved you stand a good chance of getting on-going investment for energy efficiency. But don't stop at that – keep track of the savings post investment and regularly report back on your achievements.

The key steps are:

- Measure your usage
- Benchmark against other buildings or processes
- Audit how energy is being used
- Invest in efficiency
- Monitor the ongoing savings
- Communicate your achievements