

'Energy Champs' help bring down electricity bills

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If 'pester power' can be used by companies to sell their products, it can also be used effectively for social change. That's what Tata Power found when it started a campaign to curb wasteful usage of power and educate society on the need to conserve energy. By targeting school children, it found that it could address parents, teachers, peers and entire neighbourhoods.

Not only that, it found energy savings increasing year after year. According to the company, in four years, the campaign has enabled a saving of over 3.5 million units of electricity.

It has reached out to five million school students in Mumbai, New Delhi, Bangalore, Pune, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Jamshedpur, Lonavla and Belgaum and sensitised 2.5 million citizens.

This was done by starting energy conservation clubs within schools. Known as Tata Power Club Enerji, the clubs conduct three-year long sensitisation programmes, taking its members through three phases - educate, enhance and engage.

The learning takes place through interactive sessions,



Strong movement: Students of Udyachal High School, Vikhroli, in Mumbai, take the Tata Power Club Enerji pledge to save energy.

in-class educational films, presentations and competitions. The result is that kids begin to imbibe facts and information that often even adults are not aware of. For instance, the kids get equipped to interpret electricity bills, understand how energy calculators are used and how energy audits are conducted.

Depending on their learning and the extent of their

action, they are then given titles. Some become 'Energy Champions', others 'Energy Ambassadors', and in the process a majority of them begin to optimise the use of electrical gadgets and devices at home and spread what they have learned among family and friends.

TANGIBLE SAVING

More than anything else, it has resulted in a tangible sav-

ing of energy, says Banmali Agrawala, Executive Director (Strategy & Business Development), Tata Power.

And how is this saving computed? According to Tata Power's Shalini Singh, who is involved in the project, the club monitors the savings on the monthly bills of the students. Children are encouraged to start practicing energy conservation tips and submit their bills at the

start of the programme and then for the next 3-4 months those bills are monitored for savings.

"We collect those bills from kids to periodically record and validate savings. Seasonal variations are taken into consideration. Normally most children who report savings above 3 per cent for at least three months are designated 'Energy Champions'," she explains.

PILOT PROJECTS

The energy clubs started as pilot projects way back in 2007. In 2009, it went national and also launched what they call the Megawatt Millionaire Program, an advanced training programme for its Energy Champions to reach out to more citizens across the country.

"We see immense value in the campaign. As the demand for power in the country is steadily increasing and energy resources are being rapidly depleted, it is vital to involve our youth, as decision-makers of tomorrow, and join them in an initiative to avert a crippling power crisis. What's more, it has helped us to flatten the load factor... and shift consumption to non-peak hours," explains Agrawala.

His enthusiasm seems to be shared by others as well. "It's now the children who are reminding us to switch off the light or to use a heavy duty gadget during non-peak hours," says a parent, giving a typical example of 'pester power'.

TO ADD OTHER RESOURCES

Schools too are writing in on its impact. Writes Nafisa Bhinderwala, Headmistress of the secondary section at the Children's Academy in Mumbai: "Children who once wasted electricity in their houses, have now become instrumental in switching off power of appliances not in use... The movement has garnered a multitude of appreciation from the parent community as they found a decline in their electricity bills."

To take the initiative forward, Tata Power has decided to go one step further. The Enerji Clubs will now add other resources to their menu and enlarge the scope of engagement with the kids.

By including water, fuel, and paper to the agenda, it will now move on to what it terms 'Resource Conservation'. Perhaps, creating Conservation Champs of the future.