

15 organisations to cut energy use for a day

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FIFTEEN organisations here will mark World Environment Day today with measures aimed at cutting down on the use of energy.

Their efforts are part of an inaugural event called "Eco Action 2007", spearheaded by the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) and photocopier vendor Ricoh Asia Pacific.

Eco Action 2007 aims to encourage local companies and other organisations to take steps to curb their energy usage on World Environment Day.

At Alexandra Hospital for instance, air-conditioners will whir to a stop 15 minutes earlier than usual in its offices.

The joint initiative drew inspiration from Ricoh Asia Pacific's own monthly routine - implemented since September last year - of turning off its electrical appliances about three hours earlier than usual once a month.

World Environment Day is commemorated on June 5 every year, and is one of the main ways by which the United Nations promotes global awareness of environmental issues.

The SEC approached 200 organisations, hoping for at least 50 to get involved. However, only 15 adopted measures designed to curb energy usage for the day.

Still, the executive director of the SEC, Mr Howard Shaw, said he was not discouraged by the failure to meet the target.

"It's only our first attempt. Also, the purpose of the exercise is to make people more aware of resource use in the office; to help people realise the need for energy conservation," he said.

Caring about the environment should not be a one-day affair, he added.

Collectively, the efforts taken by the 15 organisations to cut down on energy use today is estimated to save nearly 8,000 kwh - or about \$1,500.

The main obstacle in trying to rope companies and agencies into the effort was the perceived inconveniences that would arise, said an SEC spokesman.

Other World Environment Day events include the removal of individual rubbish bins from staff at HSBC Singapore. Bins will instead be placed at common areas to encourage staff to cut down on paper waste.

Temasek Polytechnic stu-

dents will also demonstrate how they have devised a way to produce soap with recycled cooking oil.

Discussions on issues on climate change will be held between children here and in New Zealand via a video conference.

This year's World Environment Day's theme - "Melting Ice - A Hot Topic?" - focuses on polar ecosystems, and the effects of climate change that are already being felt.

This is mainly because those effects will trickle down to the rest of the world, said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon.

Sea-level rises, for instance, would affect low-lying islands and coastal cities, such as Singapore.

UN Environment Programme executive director Achim Steiner also used the occasion to call for "collective and decisive political will", which he described as the "final and still missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle".

Action, he said, was needed on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It was also important to follow cleaner and more efficient development paths.

It also made sense economically - it could cost as little as 1 per cent of global GDP each year - and for energy security, he added.