

Military to save \$1.6B going green

Conservation projects benefit national security, troop safety

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It's not just the troops' uniforms that are green: The U.S. military says its investments to conserve energy and water are beginning to pay off, with benefits for cost, national security and troop safety.

The Army has cut water usage at its permanent bases and other facilities around the world by 31% since 2004, according to Pentagon data. The amount of energy used per square foot at Army facilities declined 10.4% during that same period.

The data do not include the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where increased troop levels caused energy usage to rise, but the military has several green measures in place there.

For example, the military has spent more than \$100 million on "spray foam" insulation for tents in Iraq and Afghanistan, cutting leakage of air conditioning by at least 50%, says Tad Davis, the Army's deputy assistant secretary for environmental issues. The energy savings usually recover the investment within 90 days, he says.

The military's green efforts will result in at least \$1.6 billion in savings through the projects' lifetime, says Joe Sikes, director of facilities energy at the Defense Department.

President Obama says the armed forces are investing \$2.7 billion this year to improve energy efficiency. Improvements include: more energy-efficient lighting, low-flow toilets, heating and air-conditioning upgrades and solar panels.

The military, which pioneered the gas-guzzling Humvee, was not always as concerned with conservation, says Kevin Geiss, the Army's program director for energy security. However, the Pentagon stated in its strategy review, published this year, that consuming less foreign oil and contributing less to climate change are critical to long-term safety.

"The Army's mission is not to be green. Our mission is to defend the nation. In that context, we've found it's in our interest to develop sustainable projects," Geiss says.

Greater energy efficiency also helps keep troops in war zones safer, because it reduces the number of trucks on the road carrying fuel to outlying bases, Davis says. Truck convoys are susceptible to roadside bombs, the biggest killer of U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Other branches of the armed forces have also made progress, Sikes says. The Navy has set a goal of using 50% alternative fuels in vehicles, planes and ships within 10 years.

Scott Slesinger of the National Resources Defense Council says the environmental group "applauds" the conservation measures, especially since the Defense Department is the USA's biggest energy consumer. But he says the Pentagon still needs to address its "questionable environmental legacy," which includes toxic waste sites.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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