

BIGFIX SUPPLEMENT SHOOTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY IT SERVICES PREDICTS LARGE DECREASE IN ENERGY COSTS

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By Allison Dedrick

Going green is now as simple as checking email: Stanford's Information Technology Services has recently added a power management feature to its BigFix software to cut energy consumption by computers.

On Jan. 16, the Sustainable IT Working Group released the Stanford Power Management Tool, a BigFix supplement intended to reduce computer energy consumption. The tool is an additional download and not automatically included with BigFix, the software which provides security updates for Windows computers.

The power management tool creates energy savings through settings that induce sleep mode, regulate hibernation and turn off monitors after a period of inactivity. The supplement comes with four pre-set modes that act after varying periods of inactivity, though all features can be customized or turned off completely.

"With four suggested models, depending on how 'green' you want to be, and the ability to customize, you are very much in control," said Ammy Hill, an IT Services specialist.

According to Hill, there are approximately 42,000 PCs on campus, including both student and staff computers. Estimates from the Sustainable Stanford Web site predict \$17 in annual energy savings for each computer that installs the BigFix power management tool. For the 24,000 computers on campus that already have BigFix installed, this could translate into an estimated \$400,000 in annual electricity savings. 28,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions could be avoided if users download the supplement University-wide.

Users of the BigFix power management tool, including the University, are eligible for a \$15 rebate from Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E).

"The rebate money from student computers will become a nest egg for the Stanford Green Fund to fund student sustainability projects," Hill said. "This supports our original goal of creating a cycle of sustainability, rather than something we just do one time."

Rebates from staff computers will be returned to participating departments with the expectation that the money will be spent on updating or replacing inefficient equipment.

But informing people of the new power management tool and encouraging downloads might be a challenge. Brett Naul '08, Resident Computing Consultant in Kairos, said that he had not heard of the new BigFix supplement and found the BigFix software slow.

"BigFix is the worst," Naul said. "I have a PC that used to have BigFix but I uninstalled it because it is too slow. I do security stuff on my own so don't need it."

Nonetheless, IT Services plans to forge ahead with an equivalent tool available for Macs that should be available by this summer.

"This power management tool is the Sustainable IT Working Group's first big initiative," Hill said. "This is all kind of ramping up since the hiring of the new sustainable coordinator for Stanford in November. Hopefully this will start us down a good path."

BigFix is available free of charge for all Stanford students and staff with PCs on the Essential Stanford Software Web site.