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Shooting paintballs for progress Event draws attention to energy efficiency

By Lauren Ober □ □

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ESSEX— There's something invigorating about shooting a paintball gun, regardless of how much of a pacifist you might be. It's primal, relatively harmless and your target gets covered in paint.

So getting rid of incandescent light bulbs using paintball guns seems the perfect way to get out a little aggression while learning about energy efficiency, as incongruous as that might appear. What could be better on a dismal winter afternoon?

About two dozen people showed up at Saturday afternoon's Bust-a-Bulb event at the Price Chopper Plaza in Essex to shoot up their old incandescent light bulbs. The event, sponsored by the Essex Energy Task Force and Efficiency Vermont, was a creative way to draw attention to the need for area households to get rid of their inefficient incandescent light bulbs and replace them with compact fluorescent light bulbs, which conserve energy and reduce electric bills.

Tom Tailer, a member of the task force who came up with the paintball idea, said the task force is challenging the old ideas of Yankee thrift and getting the word out that it's OK to get rid of the light bulbs, even if they're not burned out yet.

"The most environmentally friendly, cost-effective thing you can do is destroy them," Tailer said.

Tailer, a high school physics teacher at Mt. Abraham Union High School in Bristol, had his students design the prototype for the paintball light bulb destroyer. The light bulb is placed in a socket that sits inside a large plastic garbage can. The light bulb is on and makes a decent target. Clear paintballs are used to shoot at the light bulb and when it finally shatters after the 83rd or 84th shot, the glass is contained in the garbage can.

The event appealed to children who wanted to shoot a paintball gun, which was provided by Eric Engler, a custom paintball gun manufacturer in Jeffersonville. After shooting the paintball gun, they got a lesson on sustainable energy from Tailer and Glenn Fay, a fellow science teacher and task force member.

"Little kids will become fanatics," Tailer said. "That's what we need because it really is their future."

The Bust-a-Bulb event is just one of a number of approaches that are a part of Efficiency Vermont's Targeted Lighting Campaign, said Kate Salerno of Efficiency Vermont. Colchester, Winooski and St. Albans are already working on similar projects to decrease electric consumption in their municipalities.

As a part of the push to abandon incandescent light bulbs, Efficiency Vermont has partnered with retail outlets all over the state to provide compact fluorescent light bulbs for a fraction of their average cost. Compact fluorescent light bulbs can cost upwards of \$15, but Efficiency Vermont is subsidizing the cost around the state and for a year, those light bulbs will be offered for around 99 cents.

The task force has been working to get Essex businesses to switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs through its Smart Swap program. By explaining the cost/benefit analysis to businesses, Tailer says his group is winning people over.

"It's just better for Vermonters to switch," Tailer said. "It's the most cost-effective thing we can do." □

Contact Lauren Ober at 660-1868 or lober@bfp.burlingtonfreepress.com