

# What's A WADITW Worth?

(WADITW—"We Always Do It That Way")

*Kenneth Heselton, P.E., C.E.M.*

*President*

*KEH Energy Engineering*

---

---

In my own experience, "We Always Do It That Way" can waste \$5,000 to \$14,000 a year at least—on up to as much as \$120,000. The minimum is based on what I recently saved customers by digging up WADITWs. They are pesky things that control much of what is going on and we usually don't recognize them unless we are looking for them. Invest some time and you can realize significant cost savings.

You really don't need another acronym slipping into the swelling alphabet soup you encounter today but I believe this one really needs to be used. You have to realize that you have very little recourse when a WADITW is used unless you stand forewarned and ready to counter it.

When someone uses it, and they always will, an immediate and definitive reaction must be prepared. If not, you will suddenly feel very lonely, shut out, and defeated. Your presentation, plan, or progress will be terminated when someone says, "We Always Do It That Way."

The WADITW is the most pervasive, perverse, pessimistic, and downright indefatigable implement ever wielded. You could probably recall an encounter with it within the past ten days. There appear to be no limits to its application. It is so much a part of our daily lives that detecting its presence frequently evades us. Countering the thrust of WADITWs is required to succeed and identifying them as leading to an opportunity can't hurt.

Despite a restriction implicit in its form, it is a tool that is used so often that it has no privileged ownership. Sometimes, new members of an organization employ it to successfully undermine efforts of seasoned individuals. The rule seems to be that whoever uses the WADITW first—wins. It serves as a closer. The implication is, "this discussion is over."

The first part of this article will review some of the actual "WADITWs" which I have encountered, and successfully overcome. The

second part outlines some of the ways to circumvent the inevitable WADITW statement early in a meeting or presentation.

“WE ALWAYS...”/“WE NEVER...”

While WADITW describes the standard form as it sounds, it is represented in several other ways. The negative is a good example: “We never do it that way.” Another favorite use of the negative is “it never worked” which is contrary to “it always does that, no matter what we do.” The key words to look or listen for to spot a WADITW are “always” and “never” but you could encounter the more verbose “perpetually, incessant, rarely.” Whatever form it takes and independent of its accuracy it is consistently used as the final blow, the closing argument, the last word independent of truth or actuality.

In one example, always running a city water booster pump for boiler make-up water was converted to \$5,000 annual savings. The pump wasn’t needed during the summer months when steam demand was low and electrical demand and usage rates were high. The \$14,000 savings should be recognized by another customer who had a peak load of 400 boiler horsepower, kept two of his 600 horsepower boilers warm at all times, and switched the lead among his four boilers every shift. Since the operators performed this switchover from their air conditioned control room they were not aware of what was actually happening.

I showed the chief he was starting a boiler from nearly dead cold every 32 hours while pressures to the building dropped from 9 to 4 psig. He wanted to change the procedure to ensure the new lead boiler was warmed up first. I think I convinced him to run one boiler continuously for at least three months before switching over, and that he could bring a cold boiler up without the building, or the boiler, being affected drastically should the lead boiler fail. The estimated savings only account for the energy cost to constantly reheat cold boilers; the repair costs associated with the thrice daily shock to the system and boilers couldn’t be estimated.

Another example: “We always run two boilers in the winter.” That was the response to my recommending de-rating of some heating plant boilers for improved efficiency and load matching. The person using the WADITW was attempting to counter my recommendation by insisting that it was necessary to run two boilers in the winter. He was not satis-

fied by my reply of “That was the case but it is no longer necessary due to considerable changes in the plant load.” He sought to prove his point by collecting performance data.

When the data were submitted as evidence that two boilers were required I was surprised to see it included information that allowed comparison of one and two boiler operation. The graph of that data (figure 1) reveals a significantly lower fuel consumption with only one boiler in operation and maintenance of the load with one boiler on the coldest day during the period of data collection. Operating only one boiler during the winter would save that plant approximately \$120,000.00 per year—a significant amount for not doing what they claimed they were always doing!

Often, WADITW statements can reveal why a facility is having trouble, or can indicate trouble in the offing. Consider these examples:

“We always regenerate the softeners once a week whether they need it or not.” That was said by an operator in a facility where steam demand had quadrupled in the prior four years. I was on site

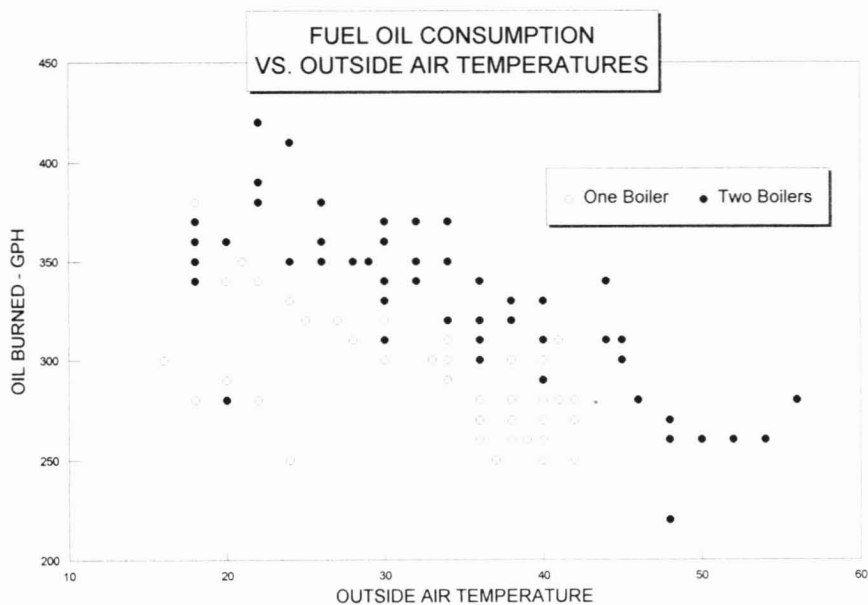


Figure 1

to investigate a boiler failure which occurred due to heavy internal scale formation.

“Those lines never freeze so we don’t need tracing.” They had just fixed all the leaks in early December and the plant was scheduled to be shut down over a forecasted cold holiday week. Several employees spent new year’s eve thawing out the plant.

“We always add grease to those bearings when they start making noise.” The amazing part is they could not recall a failure of those bearings. Heard during a short visit to a plant that I was happy to leave and stay out of.

“We don’t bother blowing down the boiler water column, those lines never plug up.” Never, that is, until two weeks later when one boiler melted down with a water level showing in the water column’s gauge glass.

“We always add extra ventilation in the heating equipment room—it’s necessary because we never insulate the heating water pumps.” That’s a compressed version of the statement, not a true quote. A licensed Professional Engineer with 30 years’ experience said that to me.

“That safety valve never worked, it was always leaking and messing up the floor.” Installing a shut-off valve between the vessel and safety valve stopped the leak. It also prevented relief of pressure so the vessel ruptured and really made a mess of the floor.

## PLAN EARLY TO CONTROL “WADITW”

Procedure Analysis, which is one of the services KEH Energy Engineering offers, is specifically designed to dig up WADITWs and their relatives—then eliminate them or provide substitutes that save energy, time, or effort. The analysis in a typical plant takes four days for document review and employee interviews. At \$75 per hour that’s a total cost of \$2,400; not a bad investment considering the returns. If someone questions my ability to find enough savings to justify my fee I offer to con-

duct the analysis for half the annual savings—and even wait for payment until they're proven to exist. I really like the odds.

Be ready for negatives in preparing presentations and plans for new projects and tune yourself to detecting them in normal discussions. A WADITW can be a potentially damaging interruption of a presentation if you are not prepared with a quick and insightful response. Written plans and reports that do not recognize current practices (what we always do) may be dismissed as inapplicable.

Entering a presentation prepared with a positive way to counter each WADITW you anticipate will help ensure your success. The retort of “just because you have been doing it that way doesn't make it right” seldom satisfies the person using the WADITW and may alienate your audience. You should also be prepared with three other responses depending on the WADITW. “I'm sorry to disagree with you, but that is not true” can be used to counter the ones that are false. “That is correct, we have been doing that, and my plan is to change it” can be used to counter truthful ones. “That may be so, but it has no bearing on what I am proposing” addresses those that are from left field. The most important element of responding to a WADITW is to immediately return to your presentation. In doing so you indicate it is insignificant or irrelevant when compared to your subject.

The written document should describe current practices and how long they have been in force, identifying the WADITW or revealing it to be an error in perception in advance. Include standard practice documents and descriptions in your report, either tabulated within the text or included in the appendix. Also include written descriptions of practices described verbally, especially when they do not concur with written instructions and procedures.

**Despite the oppressive nature of a WADITW when used in opposition to what we may be attempting to accomplish, it's almost always a pointer to opportunity. A normal practice that is a WADITW as opposed to a written procedure or planned activity is a prime opportunity for producing savings. The pervasiveness of a WADITW and the familiarity it enjoys can stand as a large obstacle to its elimination as an energy waster. Overcoming all that can be very beneficial.**

---

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Ken Heselton** is president of KEH Energy Engineering in Joppa,

Maryland. He has been a Certified Energy Manager since 1983 and has presented several papers at AEE World Energy Engineering Congresses. Ken has designed and installed (or supervised installation of) a wide range of energy utilization/conservation projects ranging from single residential biomass heating to 100-million Btu per hour waste heat recovery. His principal skills help boiler plants. Technology buffs can reach Ken at [KEH\\_Energy\\_Engineering@compuserve.com](mailto:KEH_Energy_Engineering@compuserve.com)