

JULY 9, 2010, 10:31 AM

## **Might We Do as the Romans Do?**

By *ELISABETH ROSENTHAL*

Three years ago, the Italian energy giant Eni began what is now a summer tradition: from June 1 to Sept. 1, the company sets the thermostat in its corporate office buildings 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) higher than it had in summers before 2007. It also allows employees to “take off their ties” – that is, wear lighter, more casual clothes to work.

Don't misunderstand: Eni uses air-conditioning, and the offices are more than comfortable. It simply allows the temperature to creep up a tiny bit; most workers wouldn't even notice.

(The temperature set in the various ENI buildings varies, a spokeswoman said, with the only rule of thumb that it be 1 degree Celsius lower than it was before the initiative began.)

The point, of course, is to use less air conditioning during Italy's scorching summers so the company can save energy and reduce attendant fossil fuel emissions. Last year, Eni calculates, that simple intervention saved 386,000 kilowatt hours of electricity, a 9.5 percent cut in energy consumption over the summer.

To put that into perspective, comparable energy savings would be achieved if 800 employees traveled to work using public transportation over the summer instead of commuting by private automobile. (Although the latter would be unlikely in car-crazed Italy!)

The larger point of the summer tradition is consciousness-raising — “to contribute to building awareness about the energy consumption associated with the use of air conditioners during the summer months,” as the company puts it.

I suppose we could use some of that awareness ourselves.