

Hyper-localised spotlight heaters track you like 'a personal sun'

Star Online Report

A new type of hyper-localised heater could allow big commercial buildings to drastically reduce their energy costs by only warming up individuals – not the whole room, theindependent.co.uk.

The Local Warming prototype from MIT's Senseable City Laboratory looks like a spotlight from a theatre but projects heat instead of visible light in the form of infrared beams.

Motion sensing technology autonomously follows people around a building meaning anyone wandering through that airy public lobby is made “comfortably warm in an otherwise cold environment”.

In a press release, MIT says that in America commercial buildings account for 20 per cent of the country's energy consumption – with heating taking up a sizeable chunk of this budget.

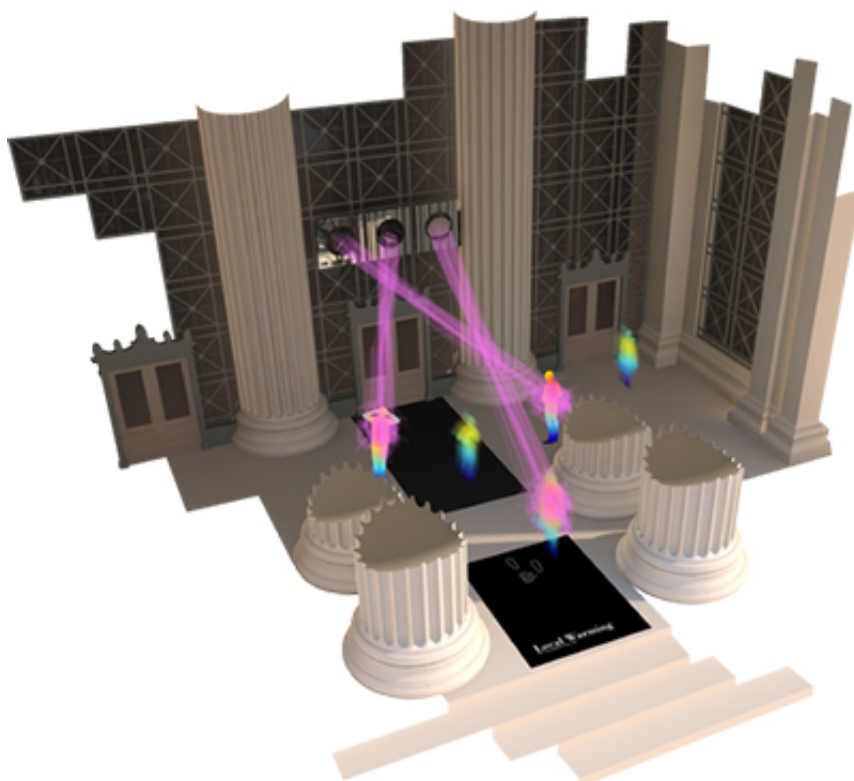
“Large quantities of energy are wasted on empty offices at night; dark corners of empty rooms in partially occupied buildings are heated simply because no better solutions exist,” say the researchers.

“While over time there has been improved retention of pervasive heating through developments in materials and construction, we believe a fundamental shift in climate control strategy towards occupant-localized heating will achieve an order of magnitude improvement in heating efficiency.”

The team behind the project also note that it blurs “the architectural boundary between interior and exterior”. It's an interesting thought, certainly; if we think of interior spaces as those that are warm and keep us sheltered from the elements, what's to stop open spaces with hyper-localized heating becoming more welcoming venues for activities such as eating or working?



The current heater uses LED bulbs to direct infrared heat at people - future versions could be more energy efficient



Motion-tracking technology pinpoints people in the room, delivering warmth on a personal basis.

Speaking to Wired, Carlo Ratti, a professor in the Senseable City Lab, said that although the project was only a prototype, it made sense for spaces where foot traffic was small and unpredictable - like a lobby. "It's almost like having a your personal sun," said Ratti.

Interestingly this isn't the first time that MIT has attempted to solve the problem of heating and cooling buildings – last year it unveiled a wrist-mounted device that monitored ambient temperatures and used “thermal pulses” to keep the wearer warm.

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