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PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Energy efficiency is your responsibility -- so, here's some ways to get started

by Don Fitzmartin

Within the commercial real estate industry, there is a renewed commitment to energy efficiency and sustainability. Once considered "expensive and challenging," LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified buildings are attracting new, enthusiastic tenants, seeking energy cost savings but also as a marketing strategy to align the company brand with environmental stewardship.

Strategic partnerships are being formed between the real estate, energy and government sectors to heighten building owners' and tenants' awareness of alternative energy sources. Organizations such as the Building Owners and Managers Association find their members clamoring for training on new energy management technologies and systems. Proactive steps such as these are helping companies find ways to minimize their rising energy costs.

The combined efforts of the public and private sectors, with the formation of special agencies such as the Colorado Energy Coalition and Colorado Competitive Council (C3), also are advocating for public policies that promote both education and regulations that promote energy efficiency.

By maintaining high awareness, the biggest obstacle to energy efficiency can be avoided -- inertia.

There are many options available to individual employees and entire companies when it comes to energy efficiency, as well as short-term and long-term solutions to energy costs. Some of the things that employers and employees can, and should be, thinking about include:

IMMEDIATE FIXES

There are many ways a company can reduce energy costs quickly. For example, replacing incandescent lighting with fluorescent lighting, removing steel shutters and window frames and replacing them with honeycomb fabric shades and vinyl frames, replacing outdated magnetic ballasts in fluorescent lights with modern electronic ballasts, replacing incandescent EXIT signs with LED lighting and installing lighting occupancy sensors, are some of the quick fixes a company can implement to save on energy costs immediately.

There are many other solutions that can also be identified. Tenants can find these solutions by contacting knowledgeable project managers, building managers and companies specializing in energy conservation.

WORTH INVESTIGATING

A building's HVAC system is the first area to investigate to improve a building's energy efficiency. It takes the most power, and while it is more time and money, modernizing an existing HVAC system with direct digital controls or designing a new efficient system for new construction could be the best move for a building. Some additional work that might be done includes replacing ceiling-based HVAC systems with radiant heat, and ensuring that new designs are based on actual load requirements. In addition for new construction, under-floor air distribution or evaporative cooling may be appropriate.

Beyond the HVAC system, a company might consider working with a LEED accredited architect and engineer to identify other energy saving options. These professionals can perform an audit of an office

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building or tenant space. Remodeling and updating certain areas of a building to become more energy efficient might be in order. A project manager or architect can also help the company assess improvements across a variety of costs.

EXTREME SOLUTIONS

With new office construction accelerating in the metro area, increasing numbers of companies are choosing to move into new, LEED certified buildings, as opposed to remodeling their existing space. These companies are willing to pay upfront costs that could pay-off exponentially in the long term. Owners are improving the salability and leaseability of their building or office space, and are enhancing their company brand through LEED certification or participation in the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program.

If a company decides to choose an ultimate solution, there are important things to keep in mind. First, they should engage a project manager that can assist with assembling a qualified team including LEED accredited members and additional experts that grasp all of the energy-efficient solutions available. They should also be prepared to establish a true value for their property, based on the solutions they are implementing. Increased efficiency typically increases the price per square foot for new and existing buildings sales.

Energy use and health care are the two of the three most rapidly increasing costs for most companies. The good news is that energy costs can be directly controlled by the individual company. Whether it is minimizing the impact on the bottom line, or just wanting to be more energy efficient as a good corporate citizen, companies should take it upon themselves to identify ways to become more energy efficient, now and in the future.

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