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Five things facilities managers should consider when thinking about solar

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The economic and green benefits of deploying solar in Massachusetts have been proven time and again, and many companies are reaping the rewards of installing solar renewable energy solutions. However, facilities managers need to look beyond the "green" and consider the potential impact on the property as part of their due diligence in determining if solar makes sense not only for the business, but also for the facility.

There are four key things facility managers should investigate when determining if solar is a fit:

What condition is the facility's roof in? How old is it? Usable space, support structures and surface integrity should be considered when approaching a new solar project, and a structural engineer should be involved from the beginning. They'll not only help with calculating load factors and making sure that any system would comply with building codes, but they'll also help determine where the system can go on the roof. In Massachusetts, structural engineers also need to take into consideration the impact of snow load on the panels and whether the roof can handle the weight of the system AND snow.

You'll also need to understand usable space; setback, RTU's (Roof Top Units) and shading must be taken into account to determine how large of a system can be installed. Systems will last 25 years, so new roof surfaces (typically less than five years old) are strong candidates. Old roofs (typically more than 15 years old) can also be good candidates. Roofs in the mid-range of five to 15 years will need a closer look.

Will solar impact property taxes? State and local tax rules need to be taken into consideration. In Massachusetts, for instance, the state has a 20 year exemption from property taxes for systems that provide energy for on-site use. If the electricity is not all used on site then local rules should be reviewed. Your accountant or financial advisor can help you determine any potential impact on property tax.

Will solar installation disrupt ongoing business? This is a valid question, especially since solar energy systems are being installed during business hours and installers will need access to the building's roof. In most cases, the installation team will access the roof tops via ladders or mechanical lifts to avoid worker traffic through interior spaces. If interior access through a roof hatch is required, coordination between the installation team, building owner and facilities manager should be finalized prior to construction.

Will my site be safe while installation is occurring? A project manager typically meets with property owners and building managers before installation begins to discuss access, security and specific requirements for workers on the property. Locations for storing materials, portable bathroom facilities, dumpsters and worker parking are also decided. Hours of operation as well as any potential interruption to owner or tenant activities should be outlined and scheduled between the

installation team, building owner and facility manager.

An experienced solar developer will walk you through all phases of the potential project, from revenue generation to maximizing system size to facilities planning. The due diligence done in advance will make the project run much more smoothly and provide peace of mind for facilities managers.

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