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Challenge facing facilities management professionals is technology - by Annie McEvoy

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Some of the most important challenges facing facilities management professionals today are the use of technology, new legislation and compliance as well as energy management.

Facility managers are tasked with operating and maintaining the built environment. Technology plays a big role for the facility managers. Often facility managers are asked to install, implement, and work with a variety of technologies without any prior experience.

Technology is at the forefront and changing quicker than most of us can keep up. Buildings have become intelligent through control systems. Building control systems can be set to automatically adjust and operate only when needed. Heating, air conditioning and lighting can be set to automatically turn off in unoccupied buildings or spaces saving a company thousands by year end.

Most upper management understand the benefit of a new technology, the hurdle is getting staff to buy-in and then there is also the cost of new technology. The facility manager's desire for new technology can be a significant benefit. A veteran staff member can be more skeptical of the benefits of new technology and more aware of the risks that new products can bring with them. Young people moving into facility management, especially those with a facility management degree, are more comfortable with technology and open to rapid change.

When it comes to energy-saving or green technologies, the first step is to assess the level of risk. A facility manager needs to understand how energy and technology interface in their facilities in order to understand which systems have the greatest impact on energy consumption and which systems work best in what building types as well as explaining paybacks to a non-facility management audience. That way a facility manager can advocate for his or her facility. Speaking to how your building operates and giving some ideas that would benefit not only the building, but the tenants and the owner can help when presenting a budget for change. Start with items that they can very easily say yes to. Getting approval for them to accept a new technology is to clearly show that it's fail-safe.

Sometimes the best way to understand is to teach. Create and start with a plan to update supervisors, engineers, and technicians on the latest technology. Attend facility engineering trade

shows, and get involved with local chapters of national or international organizations of facility managers. (International Facility Management Association (IFMA). Check out their educational programs and take advantage of networking opportunities. Surrounding yourself with other like professionals will help you become more familiar with newer technologies helping you to realize your facility's needs. Staying current on technology advances can be consuming but if managers take full advantage of the available resources, the benefits will speak for themselves.

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