



CELEBRATING
55 YEARS

nerej

Implementing green cleaning initiatives: Helping to sustain a healthy environment

July 30, 2008 - Owners Developers & Managers

Early in its nearly 40-year history, Cummings Properties recognized the benefits of creating and maintaining energy-efficient properties. The company instinctively knew that implementing environmentally sound policies was important to its clients, its community and its business. Even though several of its major properties long ago earned the "Energy Star," people back then didn't talk about "green" buildings, and the term "sustainability" was virtually unknown.

Times have changed, however, and awareness around environmental issues has grown exponentially. Although Cummings Properties had already implemented recycling programs and installed energy saving electrical and plumbing fixtures in many of its existing properties, the company wanted to take its green initiatives further.

As a result, Cummings developed "green cleaning" programs, which it is now implementing at TradeCenter 128, a brand new 400,000 s/f office building now nearing completion in Woburn, Mass. TradeCenter has already been pre-certified LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) at the gold level, which is clear recognition that it contains many important features associated with a green building. Plus, since the clients there have stated their desire to occupy a healthy work environment, TradeCenter 128 seemed like a good place to launch these new green cleaning programs.

Green cleaning typically begins with the choices a property manager or owner makes regarding the different types of trash generated by most businesses. According to Carnegie Mellon Green Practices (www.cmu.edu/greenpractices), "the average office generates about 1.5 pounds of waste paper per employee per day." Since one component of LEED certification (www.usgbc.org/leed) relates to recycling programs, Cummings Properties created a wide-ranging program to address this important requirement.

First, Cummings is working closely with each TradeCenter client to separate paper trash from its other trash at the point of origin: each employee's desk. Since paper trash heading to the recycling bin cannot be commingled with regular waste, it makes sense to segregate the trash as soon as it's created.

In an effort to ensure maximum participation, Cummings Properties is offering to subsidize the amount its clients pay to purchase a seven-gallon recycling bin to place next to each desk. Every workday evening, building cleaners collect the paper waste from each individual container and place it unbagged into a larger bin located on each floor.

These larger containers are then transported to an onsite recycling room where the waste collection agency collects the paper and hauls it to an offsite recycling facility. The waste company also

supplies Cummings Properties with the large collection bins and provides a small rebate based on total tonnage.

In addition, Cummings created a program for plastic, metal and glass recycling. While these materials need to be kept separately from both paper and food waste, the client can commingle them, as they will be sorted later in the process. By making it easy for clients to take part in these programs, there will likely be high levels of participation.

So far, client response to these recycling programs has been outstanding. More than 75% of waste materials at this building are being recycled, thereby earning Cummings Properties additional points in its ongoing efforts to adhere to all LEED certification requirements. Cummings Properties staff members continually monitor these programs and their participation rates to ensure that the company continues to meet or exceed LEED requirements.

To further meet its green cleaning goals, Cummings Properties needed to hire a cleaning service that could meet the conditions of a LEED certified building. These cleaners needed to have significant experience with the "greening" of large facilities. The selected vendor must use the appropriate cleaning equipment and provide clear instructions to their onsite cleaning teams so they can comply with all required cleaning standards.

For example, the cleaning crews must use vacuums equipped with high performing filters, microfiber cloths that attract minute dust particles, and they must have clear, easily understood directions to eliminate the risks associated with mixing cleaning solutions.

Also, a cleaning service should consider using products with the "Green Seal." Green Seal is an organization that has created environmental standards for a wide variety of cleaning products. These standards focus on reducing and eliminating a product's environmental impact. According to the Green Seal website, (www.greenseal.org) cleaning products must come in recyclable or refillable packaging, and they must come in a concentrated form. The standards also require that the undiluted product cannot be harmful to humans, contains no carcinogens, is not combustible and is not corrosive to skin or eyes. Plus, the product, as used, cannot negatively affect air quality and cannot be toxic to aquatic life.

Finally, by creating the position of sustainability manger, Cummings Properties has further demonstrated its commitment to building and maintaining energy efficient space.

Whether or not one seeks to comply with LEED standards, there are many green cleaning programs now available to the property owner/manager. These programs will help make your buildings a safer, healthier environment in which to work or live.

Gary Gresh is the sustainability manager, Cummings Properties, Woburn, Mass.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540