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Looking to be sustainable? Start with your building. - by Susan Rochford

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At Legrand, we view it as our social responsibility to serve not only our customers but to advance the lives of our employees and improve the communities in which we operate. One of the biggest ways we try to be a good employer and neighbor is by ensuring that environmental stewardship is a driving force behind our operations and at the center of our workplace culture.

This focus on sustainability and performance has influenced not just the products we make, but also how we make them. In business, we demand metrics around strategic pillars and cost drivers. Why shouldn't we ask for the same types of performance metrics for the buildings where our products are made, and where employees spend a majority of their time? The global construction market has turned a corner when it comes to sustainability; according to a recent industry study, the rate of green building worldwide is on the rise. We at Legrand are riding this wave into new territory, looking to define for ourselves what it means to be a responsible manufacturer in this century—one that focuses on performance and transparency.

We've set high targets, too. Legrand has a company-wide goal to drastically increase resource efficiency and reduce waste by 2022. Our targets include reducing operational energy and water intensity by 25% and sending zero waste to landfill across all our facilities in the next three years. Looking even further, we've also undertaken efforts to evaluate the environmental impact of our products throughout their lifecycles. But it's one thing to set lofty ambitions, and it's another thing completely to roll your sleeves up and do the work. For a global company with over 4,000 employees and 45 locations in North and Central America, that's a mighty challenge.

So, we seek tools that can help our teams capitalize on efforts already underway to improve the sustainable operations of our buildings. The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system is one such framework we use to help achieve the type of change – both operationally and culturally – that we recognize is needed to better serve our customers and employees.

LEED-certified buildings have been shown to drive a 19% reduction in aggregate operational costs when compared to non-certified buildings, and according to one study, three-quarters of firms view sustainability as consistent with profit mission. The beauty of the rating system is that it works for every type of facility, so long as there's a commitment to understanding how the building performs and taking steps to improve. Legrand was an early adopter of new technology that seamlessly integrates with LEED and allows buildings to connect all actions through a single platform to create a high-performing and healthier workplace for employees. Using this platform, called Arc, Legrand achieved LEED certification for our 262,690 s/f West Hartford headquarters, a manufacturing site that consists of five connected buildings with an original structure built nearly a century ago. Once we decided to pursue LEED certification, we formally organized a multi-disciplinary project team consisting of representatives from various departments. That level of focused collaboration was essential to keeping the project running smoothly, and it presented another opportunity for Legrand associates to work together to advance our commitments to operating sustainably. The outcome: By measuring energy, water, waste, transportation and the employee experience we are now able to benchmark improvements at our headquarters while comparing our performance to similar facilities.

As a business committed to CT's future, we're proud to share with our neighbors that our HQ hums with greater efficiency these days. Our project clearly reinforced the strong relationship between continuous improvement and ongoing efforts to reduce our environmental footprint. The experience taught us that companies shouldn't let an aging building deter them from pursuing more sustainable business strategies—the tenets of green building are not reserved for new construction or modern features.

It also became a major impetus to bring our employees together around a common goal and educate them on how their physical workplace should support them as occupants. The fact is, the LEED framework can be used to support existing commitments, scale change and increase the pace of innovation within your company.

The world faces a myriad of challenges, many of which are impacted by choices we make within our buildings. Companies in Greater Hartford and across the state have the opportunity to define what sustainable success looks like in their facilities – and in so doing, benefit their business, their employees and the environment. We hope our experience will inspire others to take similar action.

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