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Low cost ways multifamily owners can improve energy efficiency - by Judy Torrissi

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The cost of utility bills can be one of the largest expenses building owners and property managers of multifamily units have to pay annually. That's why it isn't surprising to understand why property owners are constantly looking for ways to trim their energy expenses.

The benefits of improving energy efficiency and going "green" or "greener" are far reaching. Owners and tenants alike save money on their monthly bills. Tenant comfort increases, which in turn helps to reduce vacancy rates and turnover.

Whether constructing a new property or looking to update an existing multifamily building with energy efficiency updates, there are simple, low cost ways that property owners can save money on future utility bills and bring an immediate return on investment.

1. Use Low-Flow Showerheads

Conventional showerheads typically use between three to four gallons of water per minute. Installing a low-flow showerhead can reduce water usage by up to two gallons a minute, resulting in savings of approximately 8,212 gallons of water annually and up to \$246 per year.

2. Install Programmable Thermostats

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), energy bills can reduce as much as 10% annually on heating and cooling by turning back thermostats by seven to 10 degrees Fahrenheit for eight hours a day from its normal setting. Installing a programmable thermostat that lowers the setting at night and when no one is home can save approximately \$15 per month.

3. Take Care of the Natural Gas Furnace

Replacing a natural gas furnace that is over 20 years old can be the best way to reduce energy costs. Multifamily units with a natural gas furnace can save approximately \$9 per month with a tune up. An older furnace or any furnace that is less than 80% efficient are prime candidates for

replacement. By switching out an older furnace with one that is 90% or more efficient, the savings can be as much as \$30 per month.

4. Invest in Insulation

Insulation is another effective way to enhance tenant comfort and reduce vacancy rates. That's because insulation makes it harder for the heat to escape the unit and avoid drafts in the winter. It also can keep a unit cooler in the summer and prevent condensation which later results in mold or moisture issues. By insulating the walls, ceilings and windows, as much as \$16 per month can be saved in energy costs.

5. Utilize Advanced Power Strips

Approximately 5-10% of electricity is used by devices that are plugged in 24 hours a day, even when they are off. Computers, televisions, DVD players, modems, cable boxes, cordless phones, radios, printers, chargers and more can consume small volumes of watts when plugged in but not in use. Of course, no one wants to simply unplug their electronics every day. Instead electronics can be "unplugged" with a remote control or "instant on" features through an advanced power strip. This can save up to \$4 per month.

6. Purchase Energy Star Appliances

When purchasing an appliance, there are two costs to consider—the cost of the appliance itself and the monthly operating cost. While an energy efficient appliance may require more upfront cost, the overall operating cost savings over the life of the appliance will more than make up for the initial capital expense. When buying new appliances, always choose Energy Star and save \$11-\$24 per month for the life of the appliance.

7. Recycle Second, Older Refrigerators

Notorious for their ability to sap energy, refrigerators can easily eat up a large chunk of an energy bill. Replacing an older refrigerator or recycling a second refrigerator or freezer can help can save upwards of approximately \$23 per month.

Implementing these simple but basic low cost energy efficiency savings tips can lead to big savings in monthly utility bills. Multifamily property managers interested in exploring ways they can improve energy efficiency can oftentimes work directly with their local utilities to explore unique options to incorporate these changes on their units.

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