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The thin green line: Going green isn't just good for the environment, but the bottom line too

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While not always obvious, green aspects of operation and maintenance infiltrate nearly every part of a property manager's day-to-day responsibilities, including mechanical operations, housekeeping practices, landscaping and contract administration. Now, more than ever, there is a demand for property owners and operators to be aware of the environment as they develop and manage commercial office properties.Â

Tenants will always be concerned about operating expenses and they are becoming more discerning about the operations and maintenance of the spaces they lease. In what can be considered the 'Al Gore factor', many are thinking about the environment and demanding eco-options. As they do, they are trying to find a way to reconcile their concern for the environment with sound business sense and a leaner bottom line.

While LEED certification is one obvious public statement towards a green goal, most of the office buildings within the United States are not certified as sustainable nor will they be in the foreseeable future.Â In the spirit of sustainability, building owners and property managers are implementing green cleaning practices, investigating best practices for maintaining HVAC equipment, and assisting employers, tenants and staff in modifying their behavior to become more environmentally responsible.Â

Widespread implementation of a green agenda needs to be supported by the building owner's senior management in order to gain traction and to ensure compliance. From the top down, a consistent message must be communicated to employees and tenants as to how the property is to be operated. With a little encouragement, green behavior will become second nature.

Many green practices are good business practices, and are fairly easy to implement. Getting users to change their behavior may be the most difficult aspect of implementation, but property owners and managers can do a lot to encourage green practices. Lease negotiations that include green practices such as shutting off office lights at night, preferential parking for carpoolers, access to public transportation, a comprehensive recycling program, and discouraging the use of disposable cafeteria items are all procedures that managers can easily implement and enforce at their properties.

There are many environmentally-friendly materials available at no extra cost that should be considered. Low-VOC paints, for example, help indoor air quality and are available at a comparable price to traditional paint. Choosing a carpet that can be 100% recycled is a cost-neutral expense that benefits our landfills, but doesn't affect the bottom line. Often, getting a green housekeeping

program up and running can be costly at the outset but the return on these initial investments can pay dividends in reduced labor costs and cleaning times. And, installing equipment such as a thermal ice storage system is an ideal example of equipment that produces the same result as traditional systems, but functions at a reduced cost while reducing usage during peak demand periods. Best of all, favorable pricing may be available from energy vendors because of the reduction of usage during peak demand periods. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in annual peak energy savings are then passed along to tenants in the form of reduced utility costs.

Maintenance is also an excellent way to keep costs under control because well-maintained equipment runs more efficiently. Hindrances such as dust and grease force the equipment to work harder for the same result. Therefore, an increased preventative maintenance schedule will produce better results and a longer life for equipment, saving money in the long run.

Even leaving a mature tree in place on a construction project rather than clear-cutting is a cost-effective way to preserve our environment. It takes very little effort or expense to craft plans for items such as pavement or walkways to protect existing trees and landscaping. This small effort allows a full-grown tree to remain where a small sapling would have been planted instead. Not only does this preserve the environment, but it also provides an appealing setting to attract potential tenants, thus benefiting overall corporate revenue.

It is good business to save energy and resources; and good for the bottom line to implement cost-saving measures that also promote health, wellness and conservation. Being green for the sake of being green is nice, but if it sabotages your budget it is no longer a good business decision. However, when being green doesn't break the bank, or best of all reduces costs, operating within a green mindset is more than the responsible thing to do. By establishing green goals early and in writing, property managers have a much better chance of operating green.

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