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IREM is helping you in going and living green

June 30, 2009 - Owners Developers & Managers

It is hard to believe we are already half way through 2009. It is even harder to believe we are quickly approaching summer; especially, as the weather has seemed much more like fall. The challenge of our weather has really made me think more about climate change and how we all impact our environment every day in our personal and professional lives.

This year, more than ever, we have all been inundated with information on Going and Living Green, getting LEED certified, new energy initiatives, energy rebates, tax incentives, etc. The volume of information available to us on these subjects is nothing short of overwhelming. Where do we start? How do we start? How do we avail ourselves of the various funding and rebate programs?

On June 3rd, IREM Boston Chapter #4 held a workshop sponsored by ARS Services of Newton and GEM Plumbing & Heating of R.I. on Understanding the Green Movement and How to Get Green 101. The focus of the workshop was to help real estate professionals gain an in-depth understanding of the green movement and offer guidance to them on how to create a green plan that what would be most applicable and practical for their properties. Maneuvering around the "standing room" only crowd, it was clear to me that I was not alone in my quest for a better understanding of green and how to create a green environment.

Larry Gemma, executive vice president of Gem Plumbing & Heating, started the workshop by giving a detailed overview of the different forms of fossil fuels we use today, how pricing and availability of various fuels are determined, future forecast on energy demands, and the impact that our present energy sources have on our environment. Gemma shared with the group the statistic that in the United States, heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems (HVAC) account for approximately 50% of the energy used in residential buildings; 30% in commercial buildings. Imagine the savings possibilities and positive impact on our environment if we could successfully develop and incorporate an alternative energy source for HVAC use. This further focused the issue by prompting a detailed discussion of alternate energy sources and technologies that are environmentally friendly and available to meet the needs of our properties today and in the future.

Gemma and colleagues presented information to the group on the several alternate energy sources that are readily available in our region, beginning with the most popular - solar energy. Solar energy was categorized into two main areas: thermal energy and light heat. Solar thermal technology uses the sun's heat energy to heat substances such as water or air. Photovoltaic, a semiconductor-based technology, converts light energy directly into an electric current that can be used immediately or stored for later use. Driving around Massachusetts recently, I started taking notice of quite a few

buildings being fitted with Photovoltaic panels. Although Photovoltaic panels are significantly smaller and more aesthetically pleasing than the old solar panels I remember, it takes far more of them to be affixed to a roof to be effective. In speaking with some property management companies that have already installed the photovoltaic panels, the initial feedback on energy savings has been overwhelmingly positive.

Other alternative energy sources discussed were wind power which is plentiful and renewable; geothermal heat which originates from the earth's fiery core; cogeneration which uses a heat engine to simultaneously generate both electricity and useful heat; and biomass energy which uses natural materials or waste products to make electricity.

To determine which alternative energy source and incentives may be available to your property, an energy and property assessment should be conducted. This assessment is the first step to determine your current energy, where you can improve efficiency, and what alternate energy source may be appropriate and effective. Assessments can be done either in-house or by qualified contractor. Information on performing your own audit or locating a qualified energy audit contractor can be found at www.energystar.gov.

The American Recover and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated a portion of the \$787 billion dollars to renewable energy including those noted in this article. Additionally, every state has its own tax incentive and rebate program for energy conservation projects. There are many websites available to find out more specific information on incentives and rebates in your area; such as, www.mass.gov, www.energystar.gov, and www.gemplumbing.com.

So how do you start going "Green" today? Conduct or schedule your energy audit; become more aware of products and equipment that you purchase; such as, changing to environmental friendly cleaners or use of recycled paper products is a great beginning; and continue to get educated on Green!

On September 14th, IREM Boston Chapter #4 will be holding a second, more in-depth, session on Going Green including the different levels of certification that can be achieved and how to achieve them. For more information on this session or to register, please visit our website at www.iremboston.org or contact IREM Boston Chapter #4 at 617-328-7565.

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