



## Sustainability's big savings flow with water

October 29, 2012 - Green Buildings

Sustainability programs instituted by commercial real estate owners and operators really began to take hold in the past 5-7 years and continue to evolve.

First came the low-hanging fruit, particularly energy-savings initiatives related to saving energy that could be implemented easily. Then, some owners began to make investments to upgrade infrastructure - making more substantial inroads throughout the energy-use spectrum - including the areas of lighting, heating, air conditioning, and on-site alternative energy sources. With many tenants now paying close attention - and demanding that landlords be responsible environmental stewards, marked by sustainable certifications including Energy Star and LEED - new conservation opportunities have become paramount.

So what's next? SL Green Realty Corp. is already looking ahead, capitalizing on the next savings front: Water. In December 2011, SL Green announced the receipt of a LEED-EB Gold Certification at 360 Hamilton Ave. in White Plains. As part of this certification, SL Green addressed water efficiency to exceed LEED requirements by more than 30%. Achieved through dual flush toilet sensors, water restricting devices for urinals, low flow faucet aerators, and low flow shower heads, this program saved 500,000 gallons of water annually. We reasoned that it made sense to go beyond energy and recognize the value of a strong, well rounded efficiency program. While our energy efficiency program undoubtedly continues to provide significant cost savings, water conservation is not to be overlooked. Based on results so far, we estimate our water efficiency measures have achieved more than \$110,000 in annual savings, reducing use by 13 million gallons, which is equivalent to 17 Olympic size swimming pools. That's no drop in the bucket!

While SL Green received attention for cutting-edge energy efficiency programs including the recent installation of more than 16,000 LED light bulbs at 21 of its properties, which will save \$750,000 annually, we replaced inefficient faucet aerators with high efficiency 0.5 gallon per minute aerators throughout all of the portfolio's common-area restrooms. Aligning with LEED requirements, this initiative was cost effective and easily installed to offer a rapid 2-3 month payback, reducing some building water use by as much as 10%.

As we continue to implement these effective water saving programs, we're thinking ahead. The introduction of new HVAC treatment systems utilizing natural materials and processes to protect building infrastructure show promise. Initial pilot testing at one property anticipates water savings of 600,000 gallons annually by limiting wasteful system draining and cleanout processes, while eliminating the use of harsh chemicals.

Optimistic that exploring avenues such as water conservation will not only achieve significant environmental benefits, but generate new avenues for financial savings, SL Green views water efficiency as a key component within its sustainability program with effective measures readily available for everyone.

Jay Black is director of sustainability at SL Green Realty Corp., New York, N.Y.

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