



Demand a plan for your green initiatives

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This article can't begin to define all of the interrelated benefits of embracing a "green building initiative," however, I do want to talk about the importance of creating a plan to help your initiatives. Any well thought-out plan can offer an acceptable payback and provide enormous savings over time. Even greater is the benefit to the environment, both within your building and beyond. Upfront planning can make the difference between reaching and exceeding your goals.

As considerations are given to embracing an energy enhancement initiative, a building's electrical and mechanical systems may be thought of as one interrelated entity. As systems are optimized or earmarked for replacement, the common goal is to provide the greatest occupancy comfort, using the least energy possible. Since each system reacts more or less to the operations of others, treating the building as a whole, then organizing each individual system into a hierarchy of importance is a crucial first step towards creating a truly green building program. Reduced lighting wattages will impact the HVAC system. So will increasing quantities of computers, printers or occupants. The key question of "how to define importance" requires the understanding of each system, how each affects the others and rating the benefits of upgrades. Then decide if the payback period is reasonable. You would not want to replace the HVAC system first, only to find out later that the energy-efficient glazing, white roof and LED lights installed after the HVAC upgrade, made the old unit more than adequate for the foreseeable future.

In terms of lighting, short life-spans of most halogen and incandescent lighting or the eco-unfriendliness of fluorescents, containing mercury, add hazardous recycling to costs. The new technology of today's LED-based lighting reduces cost of maintenance, offers low wattage and reliability. But, like any investment, it's important to avoid the "penny-wise, pound-foolish" mentality while choosing an LED lighting package. Not all LED products are created equal. Unless you plan to do the proper research, consult with a lighting professional, early in the project. Knowing that you're making the best choice offers peace of mind. Many energy-efficiency projects are eligible for rebates and incentives. Not all products will qualify. If rebates are important to you, seeking a professional to help with the process can smooth the road. They'll help ensure product-eligibility, submit the proper forms and schedule pre or post-inspections. A rebate and incentives consultant can also provide pre and post-project comparison reports including, return on investment and environmental impact.

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