



After the building goes up: Unlocking green potential

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As the design and construction industry diligently work to create buildings that lessen their environmental impact, erecting a sustainable structure is only half the battle. Once the building switches hands, it is up to the facilities management, building ownership, and tenants to ensure the design intent is achieved.

Facilities staff must be trained on how to maintain and operate the buildings systems. It is estimated that over the life cycle of a building, design and construction comprise 10-20% of cost, and operations and maintenance account for the remaining 80-90%. At the end of construction and beginning of occupancy is the ideal window to educate the staff on important design features that will save energy and water consumption. The training should be a process and intermittent checks should be conducted to ensure the team is fully engaged and are following the prescribed methods, not relying on old knowledge that might not work best with the new building. Lastly, it would be ideal to conduct periodic training courses to keep the information fresh and field any questions or problems. It is a shame to design a sustainable building and lose its benefits due to lack of training.

Tenant engagement is also a necessity to maximize the buildings full potential. At a very minimum, tenants should be educated about what the buildings sustainable features are and how these impact their living/working environment. Furthermore, showing the tenants first-hand how their behavior impacts the environment can be a valuable learning tool. For example, explaining why the lights are on occupant sensors, and how leaving lights on while no one is using a space increases energy costs and consumes valuable natural resources.

These crucial players hold the key to unlock a buildings green potential. Building staff and occupants must be educated on how to utilize the building and its systems to achieve optimal performance. Furthermore management and occupant engagement is crucial both early on and throughout the buildings life. Each person that is involved with the design, construction, and use of a building holds the opportunity to conserve the earth's resources and contribute to a sustainable future.

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