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Taking Responsibility for Actions: Encouraging Others Through Doing

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We are barraged with information about the devastating consequences we will face if we don't take drastic steps to protect and conserve our natural resources. April's

Earth Day celebrations served as yet another increasingly urgent reminder about the need for change in our society. A culture of excessive consumption and hyper commercialism has contributed significantly to the depletion of our natural resources and the acceleration of global warming.

The construction, use and demolition of our buildings, as well as the manufacturing of building materials, add to the environmental issues we face. Nationwide, buildings account for a third of our total energy use, greenhouse-gas emissions and waste output, according to the U.S. Green Building Council. Becoming more environmentally responsible is critical for facilities managers if we hope to create a new culture of sustainability.

In Boston, there already are some environmental leaders to whom we can look for inspiration. Cambridge-based Genzyme has received widespread publicity for its Kendall Square headquarters, which is one of only 32 "platinum" LEED-certified buildings in the country. At Boston's Logan Airport, Terminal A has become the first airport in the nation to be LEED certified. Among Terminal A's environmentally friendly elements are a heat-

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reflecting roof and windows, low-flow faucets and waterless urinals, self-dimming lights and stormwater filtration.

Setting the Standard

To create a world where building green becomes just a part of good business practice, the commercial real estate community must take a lead role in setting a standard for environmental leadership. Though designing, constructing and operating high-performance sustainable buildings is the ultimate goal, there are many other ways that property owners and managers can become more environmentally responsible. Purchasing green products and hiring vendors who incorporate environmentally friendly and sustainable practices into their businesses are two methods.

Maintaining a large office building or park requires the daily or weekly use of hundreds of products, from floor cleaners and hand soap to paint, fertilizer and paper goods. Using green products not only protects the earth but promotes the health and well-being of your employees. Eliminating caustic, acidic and abrasive cleaners and replacing them with green products also extends the useful lives of carpets, floor coverings, wall treatments and more. Today, green products are widely available and sold by many well-known companies like Sherwin Williams, Kimberly-Clark, Kohler and others. There are energy-efficient appliances, lighting, furniture – the list is endless.

Outside Influences

Environmental responsibility should be at the top of the criteria list when selecting major vendors to enhance or maintain a facility. Often, the largest outside vendor within a building or office park is the dining management services provider. Establishing a green dining program is particularly important to the overall economic and environmental

health of a building or office park. Facilities managers should pay special attention to "greening" this function.

To determine whether the dining-management company you've hired – or plan to hire – employs environmentally responsible practices, make sure they are doing the following:

- *Maximizing energy efficiency:* Is the company using energy-efficient appliances and kitchen equipment? If they're responsible for lighting, heating or cooling, are they maximizing conservation efforts?

- *Conserving water:* Is water being saved or wasted?

- *Recycling and composting:* Are solid-waste products such as glass, plastic, metal, paper and grease being recycled? Does the company compost its food waste? Does it use recycled, tree-free, and biodegradable or organic products?

- *Promoting sustainable agriculture:* Are organic or locally grown foods being purchased whenever possible?

- *Choosing chemical-free products:* Are chlorine-free paper products being purchased? Are non-toxic cleaning supplies and chemicals being used?

- *Educating employees:* Do staff receive training about promoting environmental sustainability?

By making thoughtful green choices and integrating sustainability practices into your facility's dining program, you can accomplish many objectives. In addition to saving the environment, you will serve fresher and often healthier foods, make a positive impact on the regional economy by supporting local agriculture, and increase your bottom line through energy and water conservation.

Fortunately, there are many resources and programs available to help facilities managers become environmental leaders. The U.S. Green Building Council and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency are two such resources. The USGBC's core purpose is

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to transform the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated. Becoming involved in its local chapter will help you connect with green building experts in your area, and share strategies, resources, and best practices.

The USEPA is another go-to agency for commercial real estate managers who want to go green. It has established a clear set of priorities regarding environmental stewardship known as "The Three Rs": reduce, reuse and recycle. To advance those priorities, the USEPA established its WasteWise Program. One of many initiatives established by the organization, it fits especially well with the

needs and objectives of the commercial real estate community. Through the program, facilities managers voluntarily design a more efficient waste reduction program, set goals, track their progress and implement key initiatives that will help the organization become more "waste wise."

While there may be upfront costs associated with going green, in the long run, there is much to be gained. Some may be surprised to learn that being environmentally responsible is only one of the benefits to embracing the green approach. In fact, a strong connection has been established between LEED-certified green buildings and increased productivity and satisfaction among employees who work

in them.

From a financial standpoint, we cannot afford not to incorporate green practices into our business models. Poorly designed and maintained buildings create long-term environmental and economic damage. Integrating up-to-the-minute design elements ultimately reduces operating costs and enhances asset values. And, though it is now voluntary, implementing sustainability initiatives most likely will become mandatory in the future. It is critical for facilities managers to educate themselves on how to improve the environment by reducing waste and increasing the energy efficiency of the assets for which they are responsible. ■

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