

Real Estate Strategies

Going Green Is Worth The Effort

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IN BASEBALL, IT'S THE 10TH PLAYER ON THE FIELD. IN BASKETBALL, IT'S THE SIXTH PLAYER ON THE COURT, WHILE IN FOOTBALL, IT'S THE 12TH MAN ON THE GRIDIRON.

What are they talking about? The crowd! It's all about the atmospherics that affect performance.

The same is true in real estate.

While buildings don't cheer on the home team, they play a major role in the health, morale and productivity of your workforce. And having a good building in your corner, is well, good as green.

How does a positive building environment benefit your business? It's not just cutting operating costs through fuel savings. There's a new generation of green buildings that promote greater worker productivity and improved morale.

Anyone familiar with "building sickness syndrome," understands how a legacy non-green building can drag on productivity and profits. Beyond the obvious feel good and environmental brownie points, a truly "green" building is built with materials that trap or eliminate such toxins in the air as VOCs (volatile organic compounds), provides more ambient light and has more ergonomic design features.



Poor IAQ (indoor air quality) is often caused by mold, irritants, and VOCs emitted from office furnishings, paint, carpeting and other material. A 2005 study carried out by two University of Miami researchers compared the amounts of VOCs released from non-green materials and their green counterparts over a 5-day period.

Here are some findings:

- Carcinogenic VOCs from Vinyl Flooring released 2.31 mg/meters cubed into an indoor building space; while ceramic tiles had no release at all.
- Oil-Based Paint with Wood Stain released 6,940 mg/meters cubed; that's 368 times more cancer-causing VOCs than water-based paint, which released 18.9 mg/meters cubed.

These emissions can in turn induce "sick building syndrome" (SBS) among the occupants. A 2002 study from the Indoor Environment Department at the Lawrence Berkely National Lab found that at least 23% of US office workers suffer from 2 or more SBS symptoms in workplaces each year. These adverse health effects can lead to employee absenteeism, low productivity, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover rates.

Companies should not only pay attention to abundant daylight, outdoor views, individual climate and moisture control, but also strive to provide clean air—which means using green

materials, as described above. This last concept is known as IEQ—indoor environmental quality. IEQ primarily concerns the quality of indoor air. More than a concept for the environmentally conscious, IEQ is inspiring a movement as more and more companies become interested in the financial benefits of choosing environmental-friendly spaces for their workplace.

Simply put, if your employees breathe easier, and the building environment is healthier, it means less down time (sick days) and the place where people spend more than a third of their waking hours—the office—will be more productive. Companies as diverse as Toyota, Adobe Systems and Lake Champlain Chocolates are finding that IEQ and green building practices that lower operational and maintenance costs due to energy and water efficiency result in another green, as in saving money.

The US Green Building Council program LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) promotes sustainable practices in five key areas. This includes systematic and effective

ways to improve IEQ through a defined set of standards for sustainable design, construction, and operation.

As a nationally accepted third-party certification program, LEED offers four levels of certification: basic, silver, gold, or platinum. A building's level of certification depends on the number of points LEED awards for improved developments for indoor environmental quality, sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, and material selection.

At the gold-certified Toyota Motor Sales Headquarters, employee absenteeism is 14% lower than it was before the site's renovation and expansion. Because Headquarters used most of its budget to maximize interior daylight, 90% of its employees now enjoy natural light and outdoor views.

Cambridge, MA-based Genzyme Corporation received platinum LEED certification for their headquarters in 2004. Their 12-story atrium helps provide daylight and facilitate fresh air flow throughout the building. Genzyme reported that absenteeism is 5% lower at their headquarters site

than their other Massachusetts facilities combined. Its post-occupancy survey, circulated among approximately 900 employees in 2005 found that:

- 58% of its employees felt that individual thermostats contributed to improved quality of the work environment.
- 72% felt that lighting features boosted alertness and productivity.
- 88% felt that access to outdoor views and interior gardens contributed to improved sense of well-being.

The concept of the sustainable buildings will not fade as a trend of the "green" movement. Rather, it promises to gain in popularity as more and more companies understand that improved IEQ can increase output from the bottom line.

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