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awarded for day-lighting strategies and three points for views. Both the Materials and Resources and Indoor Environmental Quality sections include extra prerequisites that focus on creating non-harmful environments (e.g., banning mercury and requiring the removal of hazardous materials).

As designers and builders become more

familiar with LEED for Healthcare, the new guidelines will have implications for facilities of regional and national importance. One of RLF's current projects, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) campus in Orlando, is being designed to LEED Silver certification, having been started well before the new guidelines were introduced. In the future, projects such as the VAMC will

benefit from the more focused approach of LEED for Healthcare.

Following the lead of numerous research efforts, the healthcare industry has embraced sustainability as an integral link between the health of its buildings and patients, staff and the larger community. The USGBC provides a customized product that helps building professionals create facilities that

are both healthy and high-performing. In turn, this gives clients a competitive edge by reducing their operating costs and increasing their medical outcomes.

Steven M. Langston, AIA, ACHA, ACHE, EDAC, LEED BD+C, is Director of Design for RLF, an architectural design firm located in Winter Park, Fla. He can be contacted at Steve.Langston@rlfae.com. ■

Is Earning a Green Certification Necessary to Promote Sustainability?



Scott Renaud

A growing number of businesses today are seeking to "go green," and while LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification continues to be the best-known mark of sustainable buildings, a certification is not always necessary to achieve your business' environmental goals.

Pursuing environmental certification often entails significant cost, and though much of this money is spent on things that will have a true environmental impact, sometimes a portion is also spent on extraneous expenses.

For instance, with most certifications based on a point system, many companies are spending money on initiatives that will increase their point count even though such expenditures may have little tangible benefit for building owners, tenants or even the environment. For example, LEED awards points to buildings that have a certain number of bike racks

available for tenants, which is dependent on the number of people occupying a building. And, though the majority of a building's existing bike racks may sit empty, some owners are not only expending monies but also using environmental resources to purchase more bike racks simply to earn certification points.

When weighing the decision to seek any environmental certification, the question becomes – how much are you willing to spend to achieve a certification? To answer this, there are a few key questions you should ask to better establish your goals first.

Understand and define your goals

Before pursuing any sustainability program, it is important to first determine your goals. Is it to reduce overhead costs? To become a greener company? To better recruit certain types of tenants? There may, in fact, be several objectives, and it is important that a building owner considers not only the expense of implementation but also the cost to maintain upgraded equipment once installed.

Another question to ponder – how important is it for the market to recognize your building as green? Over the years, many companies have quietly instituted their own sustainability programs without promoting their efforts,

yet today, it seems more companies are seeking to be acknowledged.

With governments, schools and large corporations beginning to mandate that new or relocated offices be in LEED buildings, many third-party property owners are viewing LEED certification as a recruitment advantage for their building. This is becoming a more common trend in top-tier real estate markets, whereas in secondary markets, some businesses still seem uncertain about potentially incurring higher costs for a green label.

It is also worth noting that though promoting sustainability may earn you public relations gains, there are risks as well. Once you publicly market yourself as a sustainable building, you run the risk of upsetting tenants if you do not maintain your building as one.

A simple starting point

I do encourage business owners to pursue sustainability efforts and implement a few basics to save money as well as reduce environmental impact. A great place to begin is energy and water usage, which when maintained properly, can have one of the highest impacts on expense reduction.

For example, most buildings are equipped with energy management systems – computers that are programmed to monitor a building's

electrical functions from lighting to climate control. However, most owners do not properly maintain these systems and lose the benefit of this equipment.

Decreasing a building's water usage is also relatively easy. Installing low-flow toilets and aerated faucets in bathrooms and simply making sure sprinkler systems are functioning properly are a few ways you can immediately reduce a building's water usage.

Both energy and water initiatives alone can cut building operating costs up to 30%. Yet, though these initiatives certainly promote sustainability, these efforts are likely not enough to earn you a green certification.

In closing, "going green" is a great way to not only better protect the environment but also improve the efficiencies of your asset. But before you make the move, I encourage you to understand what is truly required of your asset to achieve your goals before pulling out the checkbook.

Scott Renaud is a principal with CNL Commercial Real Estate, where he heads the company's property and facilities management team. He is also on the US Green Building Council. To contact him, please email scott.renaud@cnl.com or visit www.cnl.com/commercial. ■

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