Energy Efficiency Hacks to Implement During Building Vacancy

We are in unprecedented times so far in 2020. Many people are working from home and just as many landlords have empty or nearly empty buildings, some for the first time ever. While we can’t flip the breaker on the electrical panel for the whole building, we can complete other energy efficiency measures to reduce usage and costs for both landlords and tenants, while eliminating the risk of tenant disruptions during business hours.

Below are some action items you can implement to best manage your building during low or no occupancy, adapted from an article from the Urban Land Institute. Please [click here](http://bit.ly/DenverSmartLeasing) for the full report.

**HVAC**

With air quality in mind, run HVAC and ventilation at a minimal level to keep mold out and ensuring that all mechanical systems are working. Operate the building automation system on a weekend or holiday schedule with wider temperature dead-bands, reduced hours, delayed startup, and lower setpoints.

**Lighting and Controls**

Turn off non-essential lighting in tenant spaces and common areas.

**Plug Load**

Where appropriate, turn off and unplug appliances like monitors, printers, televisions, and kitchen equipment.

**Leases**

If necessary, communicate with tenants to get their approval on making changes to their space, and ensure operators can implement these energy reduction activities.

**Energy Contracts**

Be aware that some buildings have long-term contracts that require paying for a minimum amount of energy even if they are not using it. It is still advantageous to implement energy efficiency projects during this period of low vacancy. The energy contract minimums will lengthen the return on investment, but ideally not for long.

**Essential Workers**

Set lighting and temperature controls at a level appropriate for the health and safety of janitorial and security staff.

**Get a Head Start on Future Projects**

Now is a great time to determine which facilities should track and benchmark their energy use if this isn’t already being done. Facility teams can collect one to two years of monthly utility bills and energy consumption data to understand the property’s baseline level of usage, and then measure the savings from implementing these operational efficiencies.

---

TESTIMONIAL

“We’ve implemented measures such as cycling air handler units only a few hours a day, adjusting set points, and walking vacant floors to confirm that only emergency lights are on, and [we] are actively working with our peers to share best practices to go further.”

Communicate with your Tenants

Now more than ever it’s imperative to focus on tenant-landlord communication. Tenants who know what landlords are doing to maximize both energy efficiency and health & wellness in the property are more likely to return quickly than those who are in the dark. With or without tenants, consider these communication tips:

- Ask tenants about their new occupancy strategy and schedules to ensure building services match this new level of activity while keeping in mind both health & wellness and energy efficiency.
- Inform tenants of the opportunity to maintain comfort with reduced HVAC use, where possible.
- Encourage tenants to turn off lights and unplug equipment when not using the space.

Here is a customizable template you can use to communicate to your tenants on the energy efficiency actions you are taking in their space:

“Hello ____,

While we have all been adjusting to the changes in our society, we want to reassure you that your leased space is being maintained and even improved with energy efficiency and health & wellness projects while you are away. Here is an example of projects we have been working on in preparation for your return:

- HVAC – Keeping air quality in mind, we are running HVAC and ventilation at a minimal level to keep mold out and ensuring that all mechanical systems are in working order, while still saving energy. We are operating the building automation system on a weekend or holiday schedule with reduced hours, delayed startup, lower setpoints, and wider temperature dead-bands.
- Lighting and Controls – We are turning off non-essential lighting in tenant spaces and common areas.
- Plug Load – Where appropriate, we are turning off and unplugging appliances like monitors, printers, televisions, and kitchen equipment.
- Leases – Where necessary, we are communicating with tenants to get their approval on making changes to their space and ensuring operators can implement these energy reduction activities.
- Essential Workers – We are ensuring the space is safe for cleaning and security staff that are still entering the building.
- Benchmarking – We started tracking and benchmarking the building’s energy consumption data to understand the baseline level of usage and to measure the savings from implementing these operational efficiencies.”

Additional Resources

- Optimizing for Energy Efficiency during COVID-19, ULI – [link]
- ENERGY STAR COVID-19 Webinars on Water and HVAC – [link]
  - Maintaining and Restoring Water Quality in Buildings During the COVID-19 Response
  - Building HVAC Operations and COVID-19