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Facility Managers Learn From the Experts at The TFM Forum: Energy and Sustainability

TINTON FALLS, NJ – April 2011. The **TFM Forum: Energy and Sustainability** kicked off with a discussion of how facility management professionals can use energy efficiency improvements as tools for reducing their organizations' environmental impact and operational costs over time. The April 13, 2011 event at The Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, IL hosted a group of facility managers from a cross-section of industries—including government, higher education, healthcare, and business.

During his presentation, "The Growing Demand For Public Disclosure of Energy Consumption: Using ENERGY STAR," Chris Hodges, P.E, CFM, LEED®AP, IFMA Fellow, Principal of Facility Engineering Associates, P.C. in Fairfax, VA talked about how utilities represent, on average, 31% of an organization's operational costs, making this the largest controllable operating expense for management professionals.

"Energy efficient upgrades can not only reduce operating costs, but they also help to increase asset value," Hodges explained.

There is currently an industry trend toward both voluntary and mandatory energy performance disclosures for facilities across the United States. As this shift toward increased disclosure continues, facility managers can use the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager tool to benchmark and evaluate current energy performance and then to improve upon energy efficiency. Further, facility managers can use this tool to earn the ENERGY STAR label, which is given to buildings that achieve a rating of 75 or higher according to the system's parameters. Hodges noted there are currently 9,000 ENERGY STAR labeled buildings operating in the U.S. today.

The educational portion of the **TFM Forum** continued with a presentation during lunch from Henning Bloech, LEED®AP, Executive Director of the GREENGUARD Environmental Institute in Atlanta, GA. Focusing on "Healthy IAQ Strategies in Purchasing and Operations," Bloech noted people spend an estimated 90% of their time indoors, and with this fact in mind he outlined some of the ways the materials installed inside a facility can pose a threat to its occupants. The choices facility managers make in cleaning supplies, paint, furniture, carpet, and ceilings—to name a few—impact the indoor air quality (IAQ) within their buildings. Choosing products and methods made with minimal or no harmful chemicals and materials helps to improve the quality of healthy indoor air.

"Source control is the most effective way to minimize indoor air pollution," said Bloech.

Navigating the vast sea of products claiming to promote good IAQ can be tricky for a facility manager, and Bloech advised **TFM Forum** attendees there are numerous environmental certifications that a product may tout on its labeling. But all certifications are not created equal: facility managers were advised to seek products recognized by third-party certifiers, versus self declarations or certifications from industry based associations. Still, non third-party certified products may indeed provide the IAQ benefits claimed, Bloech noted, but facility managers should ask about the testing procedures behind them to be sure.

The third conference session, “UPS Solar Energy Initiatives,” rounded out the day. Presented by William Moir, the UPS Energy Program Manager, Corporate Sustainability Group, this lively talk got right to the point. In his position since 2008 and with UPS since, Moir, who has an electrical engineering background, dove into the numbers associated with implementing a solar photovoltaic (PV) system at his facilities. He acknowledged “operational needs and financial scenarios differ from organization to organization,” but that solar energy, with its long history of commercial installs (about 40 years) and average payback of six to seven years, can be an attractive renewable energy option for many facility managers.

For solar PV equipment placed in service before January 1, 2017, facility managers may be able to take advantage of a 30% tax credit. But Moir also advised that, “without state financial incentives available to a project, the numbers will probably not be feasible” for most facility managers.

The TFM Forum conference sessions were of value to Jose Mestey, facility manager and security manager for Park Ridge Public Library in Park Ridge, IL. He noted that Moir’s talk on UPS’ experience with solar energy, as well as Chris Hodges’ presentation on ENERGY STAR, was informative to his own work.

Mestey commented, “I would most definitely attend an event with this type of format again. My agenda was well planned, and it was a very good use of my time.”

“In the past, TFM events that I have attended have been a huge source of information, and this **TFM Forum** was no different,” commented Mestey. “I was interested in finding out more about energy efficient roofing, as well as lamp ballast and bulb recycling strategies.”

Mary Alice Drain, energy specialist at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, IL, was also on the lookout for ways to improve energy efficiency and sustainability on her campus. And she appreciated the variety of topics and interactions at the **TFM Forum**. “The agenda seems very structured at first,” she said during the day, “but this has turned out to be a very beneficial use of my time.”

In addition to attending education sessions, delegates participated in one-on-one meetings with a select group of product and service providers to discuss the solutions available to improve upon their energy and sustainability goals. The pre-scheduled meetings took place between sponsors—who represent an array of facility management product and service providers from across North America; and delegates—facility executives who are looking for the energy and sustainability-related products and services they need for their projects. Personal schedules were created for all participants according to their individual interests and project requirements.

Wrapping up this year’s **TFM Forum** was a cocktail reception in one of The Palmer House Hilton’s richly paneled hospitality rooms. The lively mood there was inspired by the interactions that attendees, sponsors, and speakers has experienced throughout the day’s events—a mix of education and focused meetings—that provided the opportunity to gather and exchange ideas and information about the practical steps facility management professionals can take to make their operations more efficient and sustainable. The productive day was capped off with good news for delegate Earl Lawton, Global Data Center Manager for St. Louis, MO-based Emerson, when his name was selected as the winner of an iPad.

