

Top 10 EASY Ways to Save Energy in Common Areas

Preparing for another winter is not something we want to think about while basking in the last days of summer but it pays to plan! The Farmer's Almanac forecast was spot on last winter and it looks like a cold winter is in store for many of us in 2014. Preparing for colder temperatures is essential to avoid budget busting utility bills for your common areas such as hallways, gyms, lobbies and business centers.

- 1) Sealing the building envelope (windows, doors, entrance ways and ceilings) is essential to energy and cost savings. Lack of proper insulation is a significant factor in common area heating and cooling loss. An easy thing to overlook is proper insulation. This can often be done in-house very inexpensively by rolling out new insulation in ceiling spaces. Proper ceiling insulation can save as much as 20% on your heating and cooling bills.



- 2) Maintaining central systems is critical. Because heating and cooling accounts for up to 56% of your building's energy cost, make sure the HVAC is running at peak form BEFORE winter hits. Even if you need to pay an expert to do a winter checkup, it will be well worth the expense in energy savings and verifying your system can handle the upcoming chill. [Tips](#) for HVAC preventative maintenance.
- 3) The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that windows account for up to 25% of a building's energy loss. The proper use of awnings, blinds, insulated curtains, UV window tinting in southern exposures with large expanses of glass, as well as the sealing of air gaps can have a significant impact on energy loss through windows. While windows with an Energy Star rating is ideal and can have a huge impact on your bills, it is often cost prohibitive for properties without proper budgeting.
- 4) The Energy Information Administration (EPI) estimates that 21% of electric bills are related to lighting. Upgrading lighting to energy efficient bulbs is something to consider before the darker days of winter are here. There are many ways to do this inexpensively without resorting to a "capital improvement" level expense. [Tips](#) for maximizing lighting efficiency.
- 5) Motion sensors are probably the lowest cost and easiest, instant energy saver in common area spaces. Why leave a light on in the model unit, gym or storage areas if no one is in there? Investing just a few hundred dollars in these devices can give you a rapid return on investment.
- 6) Resealing doors with new weather stripping and capping unused power outlets are another way to stop the cold from sneaking in. Another place to address in common areas is any vent that central fans or unused air conditioning vents that meet the exterior of the building.

When closing the vent is not enough, install shutter seals on the inside of the vent and make a note to remove them in spring.

- 7) Phantom power or vampire load refers to energy used by equipment and appliances that are idle. Large appliances, office equipment rarely used and computers left plugged in overnight can account for as much 10% of your electric use. Simply unplug rarely used items. You cannot find an easier, cheaper way to save energy!
- 8) Replace appliances in common areas and offices that are more than 5 years old with Energy Star rated products. That old refrigerator may still work but it is costing you more in electricity annually than a newer, more efficient model. The same holds true for that gargantuan office copier from the 90's in your leasing office.
- 9) Programmable thermostats are AMAZING! These Wi-Fi thermostats can be easily installed, set up and programmed from anywhere. Program them to turn down the heat or A/C during evening hours. You can save as much as 10% or more in HVAC usage.
- 10) Water conservation/leak detection is a commonly overlooked opportunity to save as much as 25% or more in water waste. For example, after 5 years a toilet that was a 1.6 gallon per flush creeps to a 2+ gallon flush! Have an experienced technician or plumber recalibrate the flush mechanisms. Also, faulty/cheap toilet flappers degrade quickly and leak over time. Replace them at least annually and use a better grade of product. Lastly, replace old faucet washers that cause drips and aerators with low flow devices.

CONSERVATION TIP

Open curtains on your south facing windows during the day to allow sunlight to naturally heat your home. Close them at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.

By taking time out this fall to do this energy savings work you may have a different conversation with your owners when it's time to review the financial statement. Instead of facing the heat of "Why are you over budget in utilities"? You will have the opportunity to explain how you achieved such great savings. And *that* would be a far cooler conversation by far!



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Prior to joining Minol USA, she was employed by REIT AvalonBay Communities, Inc. for more than 20 years. While with AvalonBay, Kate successfully lobbied for the passing of the submetering law in Massachusetts in 2005.