

For IFMA New Jersey

How to Weather this Winter Despite the Chilly Economy

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The outlook for facility managers this winter is chilly. Though long accustomed to tightening budgets, facility managers will likely face yet another new round of budget-freezing measures driven by economic pressures. Also on the horizon: continuing volatility in energy prices.

Once again it is incumbent upon all of us to revisit our operating protocols and take a hard look at our infrastructure to squeeze energy use and costs. Northern organizations may have an easier time forecasting their snow removal budgets than their energy budgets this coming winter.

Whatever the scenario this winter, expect the forecast to including the need to take additional proactive measures to further reduce energy expenditures. To prepare, here's an overview of forward-looking efforts to consider:

- **Consider locking-in energy rates** this winter to provide a baseline cost for most energy expenditures and avoid the potential of budget-busting volatility. Many agreements can protect against cost increases while allowing us to pay the lower costs if prices don't increase.
- **Seek risk-sharing financing options** with companies that provide facility management projects or equipment upgrades. Under such arrangements, these companies will take on some of your exposure to costly equipment upgrades in exchange for a break on the upfront cost of service or a longer term service commitment.
- **Don't defer maintenance.** Doing so to save money in the near-term is a poor practice that places crucial assets at risk for more-extensive damages and costlier repairs in the future, as well as degradation of performance and efficiency. What may be saved in direct service costs may be swallowed up by energy costs for less-efficient performance. Follow OEM and factory-recommended maintenance procedures and inspection efforts to ensure systems are up to date. Don't leave this to chance or untrained resources.
- **Stock of your facility.** Begin by analyzing current equipment and service systems in order to ensure that there are at least one or two more years of life left in older systems. Determine what can be done to keep them performing adequately until your budget can withstand the cost of upgrading to newer, and more efficient, longer-term solutions.
- **Review occupancy schedules.** Urge your managers to concentrate late-night or early-morning meetings or occupancy in a relatively confined space. Heating and lighting use can then be concentrated into a smaller space instead of across the whole facility.
- **Recognize outside conditions.** Lighting controls become more important during the winter because of the increase in hours of darkness at the end of the workday. Schedule inside and outside lighting appropriately. But balance efficiency with safety. Test solar sensors in out-of-the-way areas.
- **Review the facility's current plug load.** Because of the ever-growing number of technology, gadgets, and appliances that occupants use in their personal spaces, plug loads consume a lot of energy. Manage and reduce this consumption by educating

employees on the harmfulness of personal appliances like space heaters. Develop a common policy to keep everyone comfortable.

- **Eliminate hot and cold zones.** Minimize or redirect drafts in common workspace areas and improve comfort by using the facility's primary environmental management systems. Occupant complaints, discomfort, and "thermostat wars" are caused by continuing variations in space temperature throughout the day in different parts of the facility.

By applying such measures—as well as your own creativity and know-how—to your facility environmental and energy use management practices, you'll be ready to face any chilly challenge during this winter season—be it budgetary, economic, or meteorological.

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