

When colder weather hits, it's not too late for facility managers and property owners to start implementing energy efficient programs for winter. With appropriate planning and effort, these building improvements could pay dividends by spring and improve your overall energy efficiency.

1. Tune-Up Your HVAC System

HVAC systems are often overlooked due to the fact that they're typically tucked out of sight in a remote part of the building, but these systems require maintenance and lubrication to run optimally. A properly maintained HVAC system can cut your heating cost by up to 5%. To simplify this process and help keep your system running efficiently, consider signing a service contract with a HVAC service provider in your area. Beyond routine maintenance, you can typically improve the performance of your HVAC system by changing the filter every three months, removing any items that obstruct the cold air returns and closing off ventilation to any unused office or storage space.

2. Consider Upgrading to CFL Bulbs and Other High Efficiency Lighting

With the shorter days of winter comes an increase in office lighting expenses. While Compact Fluorescent Lighting (CFL) bulbs cost more upfront (typically 3 to 10 times more than their incandescent counterparts), CFL bulbs use up to 75% less energy and last up to 5 years longer, meaning that over the course of their life, you can see a 12% reduction in your lighting costs by switching to CFL bulbs. According to Energy Star, a lighting power reduction of 40% increases a building's Energy Star rating by about 10 points. The Energy Star Building Upgrade Manual is a great place to start when planning lighting upgrades for a building.

3. Window Films

Recent advances in energy-saving window film offer year-round benefits that compare favorably to other popular energy-saving measures both in terms of energy efficiency and cost savings. Advances like the revolutionary low-e coating found in the EnerLogic™ series of Vista Window Films, can reflect both solar and radiant heat to help keep heat out in the summer and in during the winter. The application of these next generation films can increase the insulating power of windows up to 92%. In fact, the insulating effect of EnerLogic film essentially gives single-pane windows dual-pane performance. As an added benefit, they also assist in LEED credit qualification and may be eligible for utility company rebates.

4. Block Air Leaks

While individual air leaks may seem like mere nuisances, their cumulative impact can drastically increase your winter energy usage. In preparation for winter, carefully inspect window and door frames for damaged or missing caulk and weather-stripping. An easy trick to test for air leaks is to hold a stick of incense near doors and windows. Any air leaks will have a noticeable effect on the incense smoke. But beyond doors and windows, there are other areas of your building that also deserve closer inspection – recessed lighting and electrical outlets. While not typically the first place inspected, these areas can be the source of relatively significant air leaks and can be easily remedied.

5. Insulate Water Heater

With the rising costs of natural gas and electricity in the winter, another area to reduce energy costs is your office water heater. An easy way to reduce energy loss from your water heater is to wrap the heater tank with an insulating jacket and reducing the heater temperature to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. It is important to not cover air intakes, valves or other controls. This simple adjustment can reduce your water heating energy usage by 7-11%.