

## A Unique Beast

INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN RETAIL ENVIRONMENTS IS A WHOLE DIFFERENT ANIMAL.

**B**uilding a green retail facility today has become relatively easy. Not to dismiss the process or say it's a walk in the park, but compared to building the first LEED retail shopping center in the U.S. back in 2003-2004 (Abercorn Common), today's designers, code officials and especially tenants have a much greater understanding of sustainable design, LEED certification and green building technologies. Fortunately, when we propose a grey water system that uses rainwater to flush toilets, we no longer hear, "What happens if someone drinks out of the toilet?" as the first question.

Ah, how far we've come.

While dealing with each tenant's unique requirements and the challenges of maintaining an energy-efficient design in the wake of copious amounts of display lighting (and the requisite cooling needed to offset it) is still a challenge, an even greater cause for concern is maintaining these facilities after the ribbon is cut and the plaque is hung. Or even harder, "greening up" an older center.

Considering most retail leases are triple net, it's a tough sell to make substantial capital improvements to tenant spaces, and you're often faced with individual contracts for things such as janitorial and preventative maintenance. What's a retail property manager to do?

Retail is certainly its own unique beast from a sustainable property management perspective. Oftentimes, you're faced with only being able to control issues related to the exterior site. But what has worked for me in the past is starting with those exterior issues and then helping to create an infrastructure by re-doubling efforts to educate the tenants and their employees to increase their own sustainability.

### CLASS IS IN SESSION

I have a weird habit of cruising the back of house at random retail centers to see what recycling practices are going on in different areas around the country. What I tend to find is a whole bunch of no recycling (except for maybe cardboard), and that each retail space is often serviced by different trash and recycling companies.

To increase recycling, it's rather straightforward to create back-of-house recycling hubs for all materials at multiple locations that are shared by all tenants. This allows the big-box retailers to keep their existing cardboard contracts, yet also allows them to recycle the rest of their paper, plastics and metals while creating opportunities for smaller retailers, who don't generate near the volume required for their own dedicated bins, to recycle. And all of this translates into overall less waste and lower disposal costs for the center.



Of course, it's not nearly as easy as just throwing some bins out behind the center. First and foremost are the repeated efforts to talk to tenants one on one and explain what's happening, combined with repeated efforts to teach them what is and what isn't recyclable — over and over again. There's often a steep learning curve that takes some dedication to overcome.

But once you break through that barrier and establish tenant buy-in, further efforts become much easier to implement. After successfully launching recycling (which most people "get" and are familiar with), it becomes simpler to introduce other green practices.

Introducing green cleaning comes next. This is simply a matter of demonstrating that green cleaning products work just as well, that there is no cost premium and that clients can

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usually get the new products from their existing janitorial contracts. What typically follows is an interesting dialogue with individual tenants. You might be surprised to learn that many want to be more efficient and simply didn't know how.

From there, other sessions can follow. These can include showing tenants how to properly set thermostats (a number of tenants keep their spaces ice cold not just during the day, but all night as well), how to change filters, where to take light bulbs for recycling, and many more.

This process has resulted in improved communication with tenants, as well as a greater participation in the programs. It isn't a quick process, and it requires time and dedication. But it is cost effective — most measures cost nothing more than time — and results in a happier, greener tenant base. **SF**



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