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Building owners see the light on cutting energy costs

Efficient bulbs and sensors are cheaper alternatives to costly wind power

By **Joan Oleck**
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On a cold morning in January, tenants arriving at the Conde Nast Building in Times Square were confronted with an odd spectacle.


The building's developer, The Durst Organization, had hauled two 10-foot working windmills into the lobby. They were a backdrop for the announcement that Durst would become the state's largest commercial buyer of wind-generated electricity to help power its seven Manhattan high-rises.

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At the press conference, co-president Jody Durst exulted over renewable energy and likened humankind's planetary obligations to those of good campers, who leave a campsite as pristine as they found it.

But, high-mindedness aside, no one talked dollars and cents that day, and for

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good reason. Wind power of the sort that the Dursts will buy, or that the Freedom Tower downtown will generate on its curvaceous upper stories, is still prohibitively expensive.

Happily for landlords, however, there is a growing raft of devices and measures that do offer a way to cut the soaring cost of energy. Those means range from energy-efficient lighting and heating systems to fuel cells and micro-turbines.

Simple steps

"All the analysis—depending on the technology being used—says the benefit-cost ratio is easily two-to-one or three-to-one for most energy-efficient measures," says Ashok Gupta, director of the air and energy program at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Some of the quickest and biggest payoffs can be gained by such simple steps as installing new lighting systems. Energy-efficient lighting can pay for itself in as little as two years.

As proof, Mr. Gupta cites the experience at the NRDC's West 20th Street offices. A rehabbing some years ago of the NRDC's then 25,000-square-foot space included the installation of more efficient fluorescent lights. The modernization was 10% more expensive than a standard job, but the group cut its lighting costs by 75%.

Sensors that switch off lights when areas such as stairwells and restrooms are unoccupied also yield quick payoffs. A combination of energy-efficient bulbs and occupancy sensors netted a 750,000-square-foot building managed by Cushman & Wakefield Inc. \$1.4 million in savings over three years, according to Joe Wick, a managing director at Cushman.

Wien & Malkin has used new lights to shave tens of thousands of dollars off its annual electric bill at the Lincoln Building on East 42nd Street.

Generating power

Other landlords are trying to cut their power purchases by generating more of their own. At the Conde Nast Building, for example, fuel cells generate the building's basic (though not peak) electricity load, and photovoltaic panels on the building's facade convert solar energy to electricity. The building's architect, Dan Kaplan, senior principal at Fox & Fowle, insists that such technology has grown up in recent years.

"This is not about single-family houses in Vermont," he says. "It's real and commercially viable, and you can do it on a huge scale."

At 1359 Broadway, manager Wien & Malkin is mulling another technology. It's looking into installing natural gas-burning micro-turbines to replace as much as half the power it buys from Consolidated Edison.

The returns on investments in some other technologies, however, are less certain. Many so-called green strategies remain far from being commercially feasible. At the Bronx Veterans Administration Medical Center, engineer Richard Cox describes the facility's 40 rooftop solar panels as "an experiment."

He calculates that the panels reduce the center's electric bills by a paltry \$150 a month, providing just enough power to light a couple of offices. Still, he insists that the V.A. would be keen to expand the number of panels if more roof space could be located. "It's a start in not being dependent on our local utility provider," he says.



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