Written by M. Randi Young, LEED AP Grainger
Wednesday, 02 June 2010 12:10

You're not alone in this ongoing journey.

One of the critical emerging issues on customers' minds (and some of the most common questions they're asking us) involve how to operate and maintain sustainable facilities. Organizations everywhere are constantly looking for ways to operate in a more environmentally responsible manner than before—*and also cut operating expenses.*

Maintaining and operating a sustainable facility is achieved by looking at the essential areas of the operation. Sustainability industry experts, such as the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), look at the environmental-savings categories of a building's exterior, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources and indoor environmental quality. Each of these components represents a critical element when it comes to reducing carbon footprint and the use of natural resources. But there's an additional element to remember when attempting to operate a sustainable facility: behavior. One could argue that buildings don't use power or water or generate waste—*people do.*

By better understanding the decision process that employees go through as they discard items or use water and energy, you can help identify what steps need to be taken in order to drive toward more sustainable choices. Utilizing efficient lighting within your facility, for example, will provide value in reduced energy costs and better light quality. Couple that with good choices for how the lighting is used and you're on track for even more savings and less harmful environmental impact. Simply shutting the lights off when the last person leaves a room or leveraging sensors to judge when lighting is required would make an even bigger impact on bottom-line costs. The same is true when looking at the other key areas of a building that use natural resources and energy, or contribute to waste. When responsible actions are coupled with the right equipment, sustainability and cost savings are likely to follow—*as will the culture change necessary for lasting impact.*

Another piece to consider is the relationship between the personal comfort of employees while inside the building and worker productivity. This is an important consideration as you make changes in your facility. Alterations in filtering or outside air intake can affect the indoor air quality. Updated lighting or individual lighting controls can add to comfort. And the use of natural cleaning materials can reduce the toxins that enter the air, as well as reduce harmful chemicals going into water-treatment systems. All of these factors impact productivity of the employees occupying the affected space in a gainful fashion. Generally, that impact is positive, but it's important to continuously engage employees for input and feedback with regard to improvements.

The path to sustainability does not have a "final destination," rather it's an ongoing journey. With a commitment to continued learning, as well as partnership with experts who can help you achieve your sustainability goals, the journey is sure to be an enjoyable and beneficial one. **MT**

Listening To Customers

For 83 years, Grainger has been serving businesses and institutions across a variety of industries by helping them save time and money related to their maintenance, repair and operating supplies needs. Today, the company remains committed to listening to its customers and helping to collaboratively find the most cost-effective solutions for their evolving business needs.

With more than 8000 green products across a broad array of categories, Grainger definitely provides the product solutions that organizations need to "go green," including those that help save energy, reduce water usage, improve indoor air quality and reduce waste. In addition to products, Grainger is educating business professionals on how to embrace energy-efficient solutions in their operations. Through supplier partnerships and its recent acquisition of Alliance

Energy Solutions, the company offers training, needs assessments and audits in areas such as energy, water, green cleaning and waste reduction.

Grainger also diligently looks for ways to reduce its own environmental impact. From adopting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards for all new construction, to completing certification as an EPA SmartWay shipper partnering with carriers to reduce transportation emissions, the company is helping to preserve the natural resources within the communities where it does business. Currently, Grainger operates 12 LEED-certified facilities, 10 being LEED Gold. For more information about Grainger's green products and solutions, visit www.grainger.com/greeninfo.

M. Randi Young is a solutions development manager with Grainger and a LEED AP.