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Scot Case is VP of TerraChoice Environmental Marketing & EcoLogo certification.

In some of the early surveys - those taken before 2004 - they found that many of their customers were uncertain about what it means to "go Green," what the benefits of building more sustainable, environmentally preferable buildings entails, and if the return on investment is worth the added expense of building and operating a Green facility.

However, it appears that with time, and with the construction and operation of more Green facilities, the benefits of going Green are becoming much clearer. At least that is what the company's latest surveys seem to point out.

For instance, in May 2007, the company released a study that found the healthcare industry is increasingly taking advantage of Green buildings because they are discovering a variety of benefits and cost savings by doing so. Of nearly 100 senior healthcare administrators questioned, many reported that energy use was lowered, as were building operating costs, and that going Green proved to have several public relations benefits, as well.

Interestingly, the study found that 47 percent of healthcare administrators reported patient recovery time was reduced in their Green facilities - an unexpected benefit. Additionally, 19 percent of the administrators indicated they would be "significantly" involved with Green building and operating projects in 2008, as compared to less than 10 percent in 2007.

Starting with procurement

Because of findings like these, medical facilities are not going Green just when they build a new facility. Instead, many are incorporating environmentally preferable practices into existing facilities by purchasing Green supplies - including Green cleaning supplies - just to begin the transition to operating their facilities in a more environmentally responsible manner.

For instance, Upstate Medical University Hospital in Syracuse, N.Y., is taking a very serious look at all the conventional cleaning supplies currently used there to see which can be replaced with more environmentally preferable products. This is partially in accordance with recent Green directives from the state's governor, which encourage or require the use of Green cleaning products, as well as the hospital's own concerns about the "hazards" of using some conventional cleaning products.

Similarly, "Green" steps are also being incorporated in a nearby hospital. "Right now we are establishing standards for Green by making our specifications [for purchasing supplies and products] as Green as possible," says Edward Barry, manager of design and construction at St. Joseph's Hospital, Syracuse, N.Y. "For example, we now only select low-VOC [volatile organic compounds] paints [because they have fewer pollutants that can become airborne and harm human health] and mold-resistant sheetrock for new construction projects."

Barry has also encouraged the hospital to join the U.S. Green Building Council just to help it get on the Green bandwagon. "We are very conscious of Green architecture and sustainability," he says. "And we are trying to do as much as is feasibly possible to become Green."

Not just for healthcare

And it's not just medical facilities that are realizing the benefits of going Green. Another study by Turner of 665 building owners, developers, architects, engineers and consultants involved with educational institutions, found that schools and colleges are discovering a variety of Green benefits as well. Possibly most importantly, the study found that the K-12 school districts and higher educational institutions surveyed now recognize Green facilities provide both students and teachers a healthier, more effective learning environment. According to this study, 74 percent of those surveyed who were involved with K-12 schools believed they were better able to attract and retain teachers by going Green. A hefty 71 percent said student performance improved in Green facilities and 72 percent indicated that student attendance also improved in more environmentally preferable school facilities.

Similarly, most executives at organizations involved with Green college and university facilities also reported benefits of going Green:

Seventy-one percent said they were better able to attract and retain faculty. Seventy percent reported going Green helped them attract students. Fifty-nine percent indicated student performance improved. Fifty-nine percent said even the ability to secure research funding improved.
The overall message of these two surveys is that far more healthcare and educational facilities are discovering an entire spectrum of benefits by incorporating Green building and operating practices. Additionally, those surveyed found that even if selecting and incorporating some environmentally preferable products did cost more initially, the benefits of using these products more than offset the upfront costs over time.
Although it has been a slow process, the numbers favoring Green building and operating practices continues to escalate. Their benefits are now certain and can no longer be ignored.

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