

Optimizing Sustainability & Wellness: A Guide for Managing Office Buildings During COVID-19



The intent of these recommendations is to offer best practices to empower property managers and engineering and maintenance teams to make the best of the rare disruptions and occupancy changes caused by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Advancing sustainability and wellness efforts in the face of this challenging crisis can show strength and leadership while reducing operating costs, increasing building resiliency, and improving indoor health.

A consortium of 25 commercial real estate organizations, representing hundreds of millions of square feet across the United States, collaborated to develop this guide. It was published in coordination with the Institute for Market Transformation. This resource is meant to provide a comprehensive guide for building engineering and/or property management teams to conduct internal audits and identify ways to make building(s) healthier and more efficient.

We hope that our collective ideas will help property teams optimize facilities during this difficult time. We face the COVID-19 crisis together as peers and are committed to finding solutions to continue sustainability efforts and emerge with strength.

Disclaimer

Guidelines from global, national, and local health and governmental bodies take precedence. Due to the dynamic nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, operational best practices may have changed since the release of this guide.

Energy Efficiency

Plug Load Considerations

Can the following items be turned off (and unplugged where applicable)?

- Tenant office equipment such as computers, monitors, printers, and other office appliances..... Yes No N/A
- Space heaters..... Yes No N/A
- Electronic fitness or other amenity equipment..... Yes No N/A
- Kitchen appliances, equipment, hoods, and exhaust fans..... Yes No N/A
- Ice makers and vending machines..... Yes No N/A
- Water features and/or water fountains..... Yes No N/A
- Is all equipment is shutting off at night, as intended?..... Yes No N/A
- Is any equipment drawing phantom loads?..... Yes No N/A

Lighting Considerations

Can the following items be turned off and unplugged, where applicable?

- Task lighting Yes No N/A
- All non-emergency lighting circuits in amenities, common spaces, and tenant spaces..... Yes No N/A

Can parking lot lighting hours or levels be reduced? Yes No N/A

Can "on" hours be scheduled for lighting systems? Yes No N/A

Are occupancy and/or vacancy sensors are working properly?..... Yes No N/A

Is all lighting shutting off at night, as intended? Yes No N/A

HVAC Considerations

Are thermostats set to unoccupied set points or "holiday schedule"? Yes No N/A

Are there building areas or rooms that can be significantly reduced? Yes No N/A

Can HVAC use for tenants be "by request only" or set to weekend mode? Yes No N/A

Have central plant operations been reduced to account for lower occupancy?..... Yes No N/A

Is this an opportunity to check water temperature set points and scheduling?..... Yes No N/A

Does it make sense to shut blinds or window treatments?..... Yes No N/A

Ventilation Considerations

If a building is vacant, can ventilation be adjusted to reduce load from conditioning outdoor air?..... Yes No N/A

If a building is at least partially occupied, can outdoor air ventilation be increased to improve effective dilution ventilation per person, where outside air quality is not of concern? Yes No N/A

Have interior relative humidity and air quality levels been checked? Yes No N/A

Can portable room air cleaners with HEPA filters be purchased and placed on site?..... Yes No N/A

Can demand-controlled ventilation be disabled?..... Yes No N/A

During mild weather, can minimum outdoor air dampers be opened as high as 100%, to eliminate recirculation?..... Yes No N/A

Can central air filtration be improved to the MERV-13 (or the highest compatible with the filter rack)? Can the edges of the filter be sealed to limit bypass air?..... Yes No N/A

Can systems run longer hours, if possible 24/7, to enhance air filtration by bringing in and filtering more outside air? Note that this action will significantly increase energy consumption and should only be implemented when and for as long as appropriate..... Yes No N/A

Energy Procurement Considerations

Is now an opportunity to review energy procurement contracts to secure reduced pricing?... Yes No N/A

Water Efficiency

Is this an opportunity to perform leak detection activities?..... Yes No N/A

Are efforts in place to prevent water stagnation? A summary of recommendations can be found [here](#), while the full report can be found [here](#)..... Yes No N/A

Waste Management

Should waste and recycling haulers be contacted to plan for reduced pick-ups? Yes No N/A

Can waste and recycling bins be removed from individual workstations? A behavior change that helps with waste diversion and reduction is to make people dispose of waste in a common area, such as a kitchen. Not only is this a waste management best practice, but it also minimizes the touchpoints of waste in the office, which could help reduce the spread of germs. Is this an opportunity to implement a policy change while tenants are not in the office? Would this be allowed under current tenant leases? A desk-side bin for paper only is also an acceptable practice..... Yes No N/A

Audits, Upgrades, and Capital Improvements

Is now the time to perform a building or space audit to find energy efficiency opportunities while occupancy is lower than normal?..... Yes No N/A

Is now an opportunity to perform deferred preventative maintenance? Yes No N/A

Is this an opportunity to install smart power strips?..... Yes No N/A

Is it time to upgrade to LED lighting or lighting controls?..... Yes No N/A

To minimize disturbance during normal operations, would it make sense to identify and schedule projects that require building system shutdowns, such as planned equipment or fixture upgrades, for either energy or water systems?..... Yes No N/A

Tenant and Occupant Communication

If efforts were made to save energy and costs, would it make sense to communicate those efforts and savings to tenants?..... Yes No N/A

If building amenities are closed, are tenants aware of their closure? Yes No N/A

If access to tenant spaces is restricted by the landlord, should this list of recommendations and considerations be sent and suggested to the tenant so they can take action?..... Yes No N/A

HAVE YOU IMPLEMENTED ONE OF THESE STRATEGIES? WANT TO BE SPOTLIGHTED AND SHARE YOUR STORY?

If you are implementing any of these strategies to adjust, repair, or upgrade building systems during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Institute for Market Transformation is collecting stories of action. Please contact IMT at imtweb@imt.org.

Resources

[ASHRAE COVID-19 Preparedness Resources](#) / ASHRAE

[Better Buildings COVID-19 Resource Center](#) / U.S. Department of Energy

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About IMT

The Institute for Market Transformation (IMT) is a national 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that aims to decarbonize buildings by catalyzing widespread and sustained demand for high-performance buildings. Founded in 1996 and based in Washington, D.C., IMT leverages its expertise in the intersection of real estate and public policy to make buildings more productive, affordable, valuable, and resilient.

A trusted, non-partisan leader, IMT focuses on innovative and pragmatic solutions that fuel greater investment in high-performance buildings to meet local market priorities. Its efforts lead to important policy outcomes, widespread changes in real estate practices, and lasting market demand for energy efficiency—resulting in greater benefits for all people, the economy, and the environment.

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