

Benchmarking Building Performance

PORTFOLIO MANAGER FROM ENERGY STAR STREAMLINES BUILDING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT.

>> BY TOMMY LINSTROTH, LEED AP

You've cut your electricity bills by 10 percent. The chiller is operating smoothly, lights are off after hours, the building automation system is working on schedule — overall, you have a pretty efficient building. Compared to what? That is the ultimate question. While your utility bills may be lower this year, how do you know what an ideal target is? How are other buildings your size, occupancy and location operating?

One way to find out is to call up facility managers in your area, compare the scope of your buildings, and analyze your utility data together. But this is a burdensome, time-consuming endeavor — if the other facility managers are willing to share their building's information, or if they have it at all!

Fortunately, a mechanism exists for facility managers to benchmark their buildings versus other buildings of the same size, occupancy type and location: the Portfolio Manager program from ENERGY STAR.

Portfolio Manager is an online tool that allows users to track and assess building energy consumption. You can track one building or an entire portfolio. Portfolio Manager can help set investment priorities, identify underperforming buildings, verify efficiency improvements, and receive EPA recognition for superior energy performance. Best of all, the tool is free — and very easy to use.

Once you register with Portfolio Manager, you create a profile for the building you want to analyze. All that is needed is basic information, such as square footage, occupancy counts, estimated number of computers, operating hours, and of course, energy consumption and cost data.

Now, the magic happens. For qualifying facilities¹, Portfolio Manager then rates your building on a score of 1 to 100. This ranking is relative to similar buildings nationwide, based on energy consumption services conducted by the Department of Energy. You may already be familiar with this survey — the Commercial Building Energy Consumption Survey (CBECS). CBECS is conducted every four years and gathers data on buildings and energy use from thousands of properties across the United States — giving you the ability to measure your building's performance against that of thousands of similar buildings.

A rating of 50 from Portfolio Manager



■ Melaver's Crestwood Building, Atlanta, recently earned LEED-EB certification. >> Photo by Brad Feinknopf/Feinknopf Photography.

means that the building performs better than 50 percent of similar buildings nationwide, while a score of 90 would mean your facility is performing in the top 10 percent of buildings across the country.

If your building earns a score of 75 or higher, it can qualify for the coveted ENERGY STAR label, which indicates to the owner, tenants/occupants and the public that your building provides superior energy performance compared to other buildings nationwide. Commercial buildings that have earned the ENERGY STAR use on average 35 percent less energy than typical similar buildings and generate one-third less carbon dioxide.

To actually get the ENERGY STAR certification, an independent Professional Engineer must verify the data and ensure that some code issues are met (i.e., proper ventilation rates, humidity, indoor pollutant controls, adequate lighting, etc.).

Even if you do not qualify for an ENERGY STAR label for your building, Portfolio Manager provides a host of benefits for the property or portfolio. Portfolio Manager allows you to both set investment priorities and verify/track progress of improvement projects.

To set investment priorities, Portfolio Manager provides a financial calculator to calculate returns based on energy savings in your building. This helps you focus on the projects that offer the fastest return on investment to quickly and efficiently reduce energy consumption. Secondly, Portfolio Manager allows

you to track the reduction in energy consumption from improvements. Once the baseline energy consumption is established, Portfolio Manager will provide you a reduction analysis so you can quickly and easily see how well the improvements are actually working. It also allows you to efficiently communicate energy performance with owners and tenants.

So, whether you have been tracking energy consumption for your buildings or are just installing your first efficient light bulbs, Portfolio Manager can quickly and easily allow you to compare your facility's performance with those of thousands of like buildings across the nation — giving you a true sense of how well your building is really performing.

For more information on ENERGY STAR and Portfolio Manager, go to www.energystar.gov. **SF**



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Linstroth in coming issues of Sustainable Facility.

¹ Due to the nature of the statistical model and data available, Portfolio Manager only works for certain facility types. These include bank/financial institutions, courthouses, hospitals, hotels and motels, K-12 schools, medical offices, offices, residence halls, retail stores, supermarkets, warehouses, and wastewater treatment plants.