

5 Key Steps to Making Government Greener

By Adam Stone

It was a prophetic speech.

“With the exception of preventing war, this is the greatest challenge our country will face during our lifetimes,” the president told the American people. “We must not be selfish or timid if we hope to have a decent world for our children and grandchildren. We simply must balance our demand for energy with our rapidly shrinking resources.”

The president: Jimmy Carter. The date: April 18, 1977. In a televised address to the nation he called the fight for sustainability “the moral equivalent of war.”

It takes a while, but people do come around. Looking across the federal landscape today, much has been achieved in the realm of energy consumption and sustainability.

Five key trends promise to further the cause of conservation across government.



HOTELING

Glass half full: The world is your desk now.

Glass half empty: You don't have a desk anymore.

Whichever way you look at it, hoteling is a growing trend, one that is making inroads in the government workplace. The way it works: Rather than occupy permanent positions, employees come and go as projects require, booking time in a seat when they need office space.

The concept is green because it makes efficient use of real estate—some say it allows agencies to fit twice the number of workers in the



same space. The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions says the General Services Administration's prototype alternative workspace is saving the agency 45 percent in energy consumption and \$632,000 in reduced real estate costs. Part of GSA's headquarters renovation, the space relies on desk sharing to compress 170 full-time employees

into a space that previously housed 73 workers.

Hoteling has been around as a concept since the late 1990s, but the upsurge of telework and increasing sophistication of mobile devices have since made it a more practical alternative.

There have been complaints along the way. Some people have voiced concern about a lack of privacy with shared workstations and shortages of technical support for ever-changing mobile technologies. Overall, though, this form of office organization is increasingly tempting to managers looking to green up their operations while paring back budgets.

POWERING DOWN

Recent reports from GSA give a preliminary thumbs up to a pair of energy-saving technologies that might make their way into federal buildings. The agency teamed with the Energy Department's national laboratories to test new designs in responsive workspace lighting systems and power plug load control.

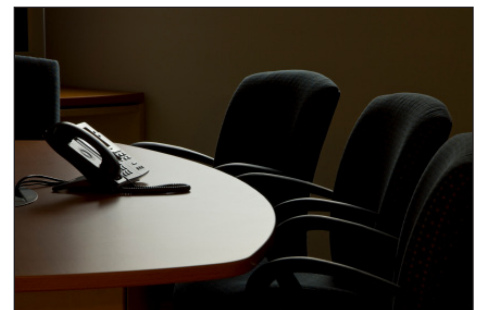
Researchers tested lighting using three criteria: institutional tuning and scheduling, in which building managers set light levels and hours of operation; occupancy sensing, which adjusts light levels in response to the presence or absence of occupants;

and personal control, in which occupants adjust light levels to suit their preferences.

Energy savings ranged from 27 percent to 63 percent, depending on how a space was used.

Another experiment focused on energy gains through power outlets. Desk-based technologies and other electronics account for roughly 25 percent of total electricity consumed in federal offices, GSA reports.

Researchers pulled out standard power strips with no control capability and inserted more



sophisticated outlets in support of more than 295 devices. The result was an average energy savings of 48 percent with return on investment in less than eight years.

Even small changes can yield big rewards when it comes to green technologies.

GREEN FLEETS

Sustainable transportation is making headway in government, according to the latest numbers. Driven by policy initiatives dating back to 1992, federal fleets are making the transition to alternative fuel.

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office found that the percentage of alternative fuel vehicles in federal fleets increased from 14 percent in 2005 to 33 percent in 2011.

The changeover is happening across diverse agencies. In 2005, 91.9 percent of the Agriculture Department's fleet ran on conventional fuel. That number fell to 69.9 percent in 2011. The Air Force went from 90.2 percent

conventional vehicles to 77.6 percent, while the Interior Department dropped from 96.3 percent to 75.4 percent.



These figures represent a work in progress. In May 2011, President Obama directed federal agencies to evaluate and report on their fleets'

progress toward meeting 2015 alternative fuel vehicle goals. At the time of the GAO assessment that effort was still under way.

This memorandum came on the heels of a 2007 executive order directing agencies to increase alternative fuel consumption by 10 percent annually by 2015, using a 2005 baseline. Previously, the 1992 Energy Policy Act decreed that 75 percent of all light-duty vehicles purchased in fiscal 1999 and beyond run on alternative fuel.

With each new directive federal vehicles seem to be on a roll toward sustainability.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

It's not enough for management to talk green. Employees must buy into green. They must believe.

Employee engagement is the next wave of environmental consciousness. No longer content to recycle paper and turn off the lights at night, corporate leaders now are asking employees to become active players in the green game. As one eBay executive put it: "Having a green team gives people something to believe in; something that is a tangible, visible representation that we are a company that cares."

The National Environmental Education Foundation offers

practical steps to make that happen. Managers can share best practices or ask employees to scout out green solutions in their operations. They can distribute green guides and toolkits and use office art to inspire awareness.

Proponents say there's a direct business benefit to employee engagement in the form of more effective recruiting and retention. By asking employees to involve themselves in the greater good, managers can strengthen satisfaction and build the bonds of camaraderie that help keep people on board for the long haul.



A NEW ATTITUDE

When it comes to sustainability, the federal government still has a ways to go. According to a recent survey by the Government Business Council, Government Executive's research arm, only 40 percent of federal managers believe government is "leading by example" when it comes to energy efficiency.

If federal agencies have not yet reached Kermit levels on the green scale, money may be part of the problem. Nearly 50 percent of managers say their agencies lack sufficient funding for sustainability initiatives, noting that competing priorities interfere with their ability to carry out green programs, the survey found.



Twelve of 21 agencies polled reported they aren't meeting their green building goals. And only 44 percent of federal managers surveyed by GBC expect to work in a certified green building in the next decade.

But there is an upside to greening government, in attitude if not in

action. "More managers believe that energy efficiency initiatives will have positive effects on productivity and operations than negative effects," the study notes. "Forty-two percent report that green policies would not interfere with their operations at all, and almost half of the managers note that their employees have become more conscious of energy consumption in both their personal and professional lives."

That's a notable sea change since the days when Carter called citizens to arms in the environmental war on waste. Sometimes changing attitudes is more than half the battle.