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Managing Building Relocation While Using a Holistic Approach

By Catherine St. Onge



As green building practices move into the mainstream, much of the attention has been given to design and construction aspects of environmentally-sensitive building solutions. An important component of the building lifecycle seems to have been largely overlooked – relocations and their associated real estate dispositions. A typical corporate relocation or building disposition generates significant amounts of waste in the form of packing materials, outdated technology equipment and old office furniture and general supplies. Ensuring that this waste material is minimized and properly handled is an important corporate responsibility that should be part of the planning for any move.

The first step in planning and implementing a “greener” corporate relocation is developing an understanding of the components of the project which create an impact on the environment. With a complete list of potential impacts, companies can develop project goals and guiding principles for reducing those impacts in ways that work for their business objectives, budget and, perhaps most importantly, project schedule.

Project goals and guiding principles should be concise and tailored to the specific project whether it is a large-scale relocation, construction of a new building or interior renovation. For instance, minimizing environmen-

tal impact is just one guiding principle that can be used in all situations. A project goal considering integrated recycling and staging space may be more appropriate for new building construction or an interior renovation. Whatever the project and associated goals, it is critical to incorporate environmental concerns into the strategic project plan and to quantify appropriate timeframes in order to develop sound green strategies and establish future guidelines. Careful planning combined with knowledge of available services will effectively reduce environmental influences with surprisingly minimal time impact.

The next step is identification of the environmental impacts and associated green programs and services available to reduce these impacts. Generally speaking, the most common components involved in relocations (besides the employees themselves) are office and systems furniture, relocation products such as boxes and packing materials, and computer and general office equipment. The marketplace has become increasingly aware of businesses’ interest in environmentally responsible products and services, and many vendors are supplementing their offerings with a plethora of environmentally sustainable materials, features, environmental teams and other support programs.

For example, Herman Miller, a systems and office furniture manufacturer, has created an internal team-based approach to help achieve sustainability goals for furniture and manufacturing facilities. Herman Miller’s “Cradle to Cradle” design protocol evaluates three key areas of product design: the safe use of chemicals in products, the recycled content of components and the useful life of recyclable products.

When disposing of furniture, your company may seek to recycle components through the manufacturer or hire a broker to sell desirable items on the used office furniture

market. Furniture in good condition may also be donated to numerous charities.

Moving companies have become more environmentally savvy, using 100 percent recycled corrugated cardboard for packing boxes, as well as recycled packing materials. If cardboard boxes aren’t your company’s style, Rent-a-Crate provides reusable plastic crates touted as being environmentally friendly by reducing the amount of cardboard used during relocations. Utilizing natural gas, the plastic manufacturing process uses less fossil fuel per pound than papermaking and also generates fewer emissions. Crates also have a longer useful life (average of 10 years) in comparison to cardboard, thus reducing the amount of landfill waste. As an added service, movers and packing material vendors often also provide “mobile” recycling programs for purging prior to relocation or disposition. A variety of bins and hampers are delivered on site with specific instructions for sorting, making the system easy to use and convenient, if integrated recycling space is limited in the building.

Vendors specializing in the disposition of hazardous materials will collect obsolete or surplus computer equipment for safe disposal. Older-style monitors (CRTs) contain 6 pounds of lead in the screen alone, while newer monitors (LCDs) and circuit boards contain levels of cadmium and beryllium metals. Some office supplies such as toner cartridges contain toxins that require specialized handling as well. Hiring a recycling company experienced in identifying and properly disposing of these types of materials should be integral to the relocation project plan. Up to 95 percent of the components in a standard PC setup can be recycled by knowledgeable and qualified vendors.

Education creates greater awareness and enhances your company’s ability to create a recycling standards program. Here are a few

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suggestions for incorporating an environmentally holistic approach to your company's relocation:

- Investigate partnering with the building facility management team, cleaning company and their recycling vendor.
- Provide central, easily accessible, well marked recycling spaces designated for unused equipment, toner cartridges, supplies, confidential shredding, white paper, etc.
- Consistently maintain recycling area by routinely emptying bins and hampers.

- Integrate recycling into everyday activities, and provide detailed information on how individuals can participate.

- Document recycling results by focusing on the volume and type of materials recycled and the environmental benefits associated with those materials.

- Utilize all available resources such as an intranet, Web site or newsletter to provide a venue where individuals can offer feedback and discuss ideas, as well as obtain cutting edge environmental safety information.

Positive results will lend credibility and

confidence to the program and a resulting increase in participation. Minimizing the environmental impact of a relocation or disposition reinforces a corporate commitment to environmentally sound operating practices and builds goodwill throughout the company and the community. Though it may be challenging to add "green" items to the already long list of project and move related tasks; companies, their employees and the earth will benefit from a well-considered, holistic approach to managing the environmental impact of a relocation project. ■