

Facilities Management from A to Z



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Water

Water is a valuable resource, which is not only vital for healthy living, but is also essential to the operation of our buildings and businesses. However, there is only a limited amount of water available. Although over 70% of the world's surface is covered in water, around 97.5% of this is saltwater. Of the remaining 2.5% freshwater only around 1% of this is readily accessible for human use in rivers and lakes.

The demand for water is rapidly increasing as a result of rising populations and industrialisation, and changing weather patterns are making it increasingly difficult for water companies to meet the demand. This makes it important for facilities managers to be aware of water costs and to monitor and manage consumption.

Understanding the true cost of water usage is vital for effective management. A good facility manager will always check their water bills and monitor any trends or patterns to annual consumption and cost over the past two to three years paying attention to unexplained increases seasonal variations. Meter readings should be checked and bills validated to avoid any errors.

A water survey is a good starting point for a water management programme. The easiest way to do this is to list all water-using items in the building; noting the number, location, flow rates and operating times. It can be helpful to talk to the building occupants to find out how they use water and to elicit suggestions they may have for improvements.

Once the survey is complete a Water Balance can be produced quantifying individual items and their combined water usage. This can be compared with the amount of water being paid for. A 10 per cent discrepancy for unspecified use should be expected, but anything more is likely to mean that something has been missed or that there is an undetected leak.

Once consumption and costs are properly understood it is time to develop and measure improvement actions for water efficiency. The quantity of water currently being used for particular tasks should be challenged; Alternative methods of performing the task might use less water. This review should prioritise larger water-using areas such as washrooms.

Good facilities housekeeping such as ensuring that water-using appliances are turned off when not in use and fixing dripping taps promptly, can save significant amounts of water for minimal cost. Water efficiency measures can be compared for their potential for reducing water consumption and a plan developed to deliver the greatest reduction in water consumption.

Recycling agency WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) provide a number of useful guides to help with water efficiency and other resources. Visit their website www.wrap.org.uk