



NYSERDA Commercial Tenant Program; Part 3: Can Tenants Save Much Energy?

By Jack Jenkins

RDA's Energy and Sustainability Group are experts on energy modeling for tenant space. In this, the third part of our series on the new Commercial Tenant Program, we put this expertise to use looking at whether or not there is actually much tenants can do to save energy.

[If you missed parts one and two: find them here.](#)

PART 3: CAN TENANTS ACTUALLY DO MUCH TO SAVE ENERGY?

In NYC it is common for buildings to provide (and pay for) some or all of the heating for tenant space, with many buildings also providing ventilation and cooling. This can create an illusion that there is little that tenant projects can do to save energy; beyond perhaps upgrading the lighting.

Our experience contradicts this. In recent projects we have found tenants will be directly responsible for between 50% and 70% of the total cost of energy used in serving their new space.

Lighting is part of this, and in some cases energy use by tenant-side HVAC systems is significant. But often the biggest portion of tenant energy costs will be in running computers, appliances and other plug load devices (we actually looked at three ways to tackle this in the [first issue of Energy Saving Ideas](#) back in July).

This has two important consequences when looking to cut energy costs. Firstly it means that the tenant can actually save energy in ways building owners and

energy codes can't. Secondly, a lot of that potential requires thinking about more than just physical changes to things like lighting and HVAC.

To help do this, on our projects at RDA we break-out the opportunity to reduce energy costs into three different types of energy saving idea:

- More efficient plant and equipment;
- Improved processes and controls; and
- Changes to workplace culture.

It is in improving processes and controls, and doing things to change the way people use the space that tenants can usually make big reductions in their energy costs, often at little or no cost. However, achieving these types of savings is not easy. It does not happen without effort. A business case backed up by an energy model can often be just what is needed to make the case that this effort will be worth it.

Energy Saving Idea:

A recent client used our results to make the case for changing the way their lawyers work; grouping after-hours users together so HVAC and lighting could be shut off in other parts of their space.

This alone will cut their energy costs by 9%. Over the 20 years of the lease, it will also reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by enough CO₂ to fill the Empire State Building.



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Jack leads the Energy and Sustainability group at RDA. He is a keen advocate for a greener economy, and has spent over 10 years providing independent analysis to help organizations both become more sustainable and cut their energy costs.

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*Don't forget to check out **part four**. In it we will be taking a look at how to figure whether energy modeling is a good idea for your build-out project? [Sign-up to Energy Saving Ideas](#) to avoid missing out.*

Planning a tenant project? [Get in touch](#): we will help you find the best approach to energy savings for your project.