

Submitted for Express June 8 2016 but not published
Re-submitted for June 15, 2016

Green buildings - a major step to a more Sustainable T&T

The primary objective of a Green building is to minimize the impact it has on the natural environment and social landscape. Additionally, they are considered to be smart buildings, “businesses” in themselves that control their operating costs through focused attention on reduced energy and water consumption, enhanced equipment efficiency, consistent routine maintenance, and more flexible building and human resource management. They generate less waste, use fewer natural resources, and by having suitable levels of fresh-air and thermal comfort provide for a healthier and more productive indoor environment.

In a 2013 Survey, McGraw Hill Construction in association with United Technologies, the United States Green Building Council (USGBC), and the World Green Building Council (WGBC) states: *“The results are clear – Green Buildings are growing across the globe. Fifty-one percent of the architects, engineers, contractors, building owners/landlords and consultants surveyed (in 62 different countries) anticipate that more than 60% of their work will be green by 2015. The most notable part is that this not a trend localized to one part of the world (i.e. the developed countries).”*

So what is the private and public sector’s position of green buildings in Trinidad and Tobago? Over the past decade, we had to first understand that proper maintenance was necessary to extend the life-cycle of our buildings and its systems. This in part, is the first step towards incorporating green practices. The value associated with properly maintained and managed buildings are now better understood and accepted. Consequently, the need for properly trained facility managers or outsourcing FM service providers in the local market has now become the norm, and the industry growing.

The truth of the matter is that the subsidized energy costs have made us complacent, and at the same time wasteful and irresponsible, and now that this is changing, our focus should be on what measures need to be in place to ensure best practices in conserving the use of energy.

Trinidad and Tobago pays less than 20% of what other comparable territories within the region pay for electricity. Yes, the Government has an integral role to play, but the larger organizations in the private sector have an equally vital role. Over the years, we have always focused on initial costs rather than long-term benefits. One may argue this mind-set is the cause for many of the challenges we face today.

Thankfully we are seeing a change in the mind-set from both the private and public sectors with regard to sustainability. There are green design elements and related systems incorporated in some of the new developments, renovations and restorations around the country. This demonstrates that the private sector is acknowledging the benefits associated with the green model. Of course, other than buildings, there are many other factors that need to come into play to ensure the country adopts a more sustainable approach to development.

There is a lot to be done, and every citizen in every organization has an integral role to play. We need to recognize and prioritize sustainability as an essential part of our personal and professional lives. Transforming the built environment into Green Buildings (residential and commercial) is an excellent first step.

The T&T Chamber thanks Roger Salloum of the FMM Committee for his contribution of this article.

Submitted for Express June 8 2016 but not published
Re-submitted for June 15, 2016