

The fastest, cheapest way to save the Earth

By Dana Blankenhorn | Aug 13, 2009 | [0 Comments](#)

Building commissioning.

This means examining buildings as they are built, and after they are built, to make certain they are running as efficiently as possible.

It's cheap. A 2004 government study indicated that for 27 cents per square foot commercial landlords can save 15% on their energy costs, getting the investment back in under 9 months.

Commissioning new buildings costs more, \$1 per square foot, but the investment still pays for itself in under five years.



Not only that but the total carbon emissions saved through commissioning dwarfs other, less cost-effective steps, like managing the methane output from coal mining, or improving the efficiency of air conditioners.

Evan Mills, chief investigator for Berkeley National Laboratory at UC-Berkeley, maintains a hall of shame on his Web site, identifying the kinds of things you're looking for. The picture is from that page, showing the damage from moisture getting trapped inside a building. Fix it and save.

A new study indicates those 2004 costs may have been slightly overestimated, the return on investment slightly underestimated. States that have worked on energy efficiency, like California, have seen their per-capita use of electricity level off while it has risen 60% elsewhere.

The Building Commissioning Association offers some templates of how this works, but it's mainly a process of inspecting your heating and air conditioning systems, measuring their flow rates, calibrating sensors, and making certain everything works as it is supposed to. You also want to check shades, glazing, check for air leakage — make certain the building materials meet the claims of their makers.

Right now, with so many millions of square feet of commercial space about to be foreclosed, is the exact right time to be doing this. If you save on operating costs you can lower your rents and still make money, or at least make an argument for renegotiating your lending agreements if market rents remain below operating costs.

Commissioning existing structures, then, makes all kinds of sense. You can save money on operations, you can get your rates to market without losing your shirt, you may stem foreclosure, and you're picking the lowest-hanging fruit on the green energy tree.

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John Dodge

John Dodge has answered the call of journalism for 33 years, most of the time covering technology, engineering and business. While he's run magazines, newsweeklies and web sites, reporting and writing always took up half his time. He has have plied his craft at the WSJ, Boston Globe, PC Week (now eWeek), EDN, Design News, Electronic Business, Bio-IT World, Health-IT World, the Lowell Sun, Haverhill Gazette and Newburyport Daily News. He would have like to have been around when Boston supported seven or more newspapers (1940s) and while steam locomotives still pulled trains, but that era was nearly over by the time he raced into the world. That said, he has been blogging and shooting and editing video, writing for web and other online contents tasks for years now.

He has won numerous journalism awards in the past two years, including two Eddie Golds, one Neal finalist and the IEEE Award for Distinguished Journalism all for his reporting and coverage of the [Boeing 787 Dreamliner](#).

Besides his family and myriad hobbies, reporting and writing is why he gets up in the morning. His personal blog focuses on netbooks and is called [The Dodge Retort](#).

John Dodge

John Dodge prides himself on completely independent journalism. His opinions, observations and reporting are not influenced by any financial holdings. He holds no shares in computer, electronics, software or Internet companies. He also has no business affiliations with organizations except with those for which he creates content as a freelancer.

Dana Blankenhorn

Dana Blankenhorn has been a business journalist for nearly 25 years and has covered the online world professionally since 1985. He founded the Interactive Age Daily for CMP Media, and has written for the Chicago Tribune, Advertising Age's "NetMarketing" supplement, and dozens of other publications over the years.

Dana Blankenhorn

Dana Blankenhorn has been a technology reporter since 1982, a business reporter since 1978, and a writer for as long as he can remember. His Schwab IRA has a few tech stocks in it, most notably some Intel and Applied Materials bought over 10 years ago. But the vast majority of his tiny fortune (emphasis on the word tiny) is invested in mutual funds. He presently writes for no one else but ZDNet, SmartPlanet and himself. But if you've got an opportunity let him know. If he takes the gig he'll first add it to this disclosure page. The Thinking Tech blog focuses on technologies such as virtualization, smart electric grids, enterprise 2.0, open source, data center management, green technology and the intersection between the innovation and application of these advancements.

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