

Why the green building buy-in is vital for corporates, developers

Sustainable development specialists and property analysts have urged all South African businesses and developers to embrace the reality of "green building" as government actively pursues legislation to enforce more sustainable construction.



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Chris Allen, a lecturer in building science within the department of construction management at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU), advises that government is in the process of developing a green building framework aligned to the Green Building Council of South Africa's green star rating system, in order to reap the benefits in government buildings throughout the country, namely more efficient operation leading to lower running costs.

On the back of these moves to strengthen South Africa's already significant switch to more sustainable buildings in the wake of the energy crisis of 2008, government is providing both the carrot and stick to get the private sector to follow suit.

"You're going to see the private sector adopting green building practices more vigorously, with the government starting to request energy performance certificates for their buildings this year, with the aim of asking the same of commercial buildings from 2018 and the private sector from 2020," said Allen.

Cutting costs

Allen recently spoke on the topic at a regional SA Property Owners Association (SAPOA) meeting in Port Elizabeth. He was joined by sustainable solutions experts Brian van Niekerk, managing director of sustainable solutions company Rhino Group, and Heather McEwan, MD of Rhino Group company Rhino Lighting.

"The real benefits to green buildings start to accrue when it comes to their running costs. The commercial reality is that their running costs are 30 to 40% down on conventional developments. Added to this is a similar improvement in the productivity levels of people working in green buildings as a result of increased natural lighting levels, ventilation rates and even how those commuting to these buildings get there," said Allen.



From L - R Chris Allen; SAPOA Port Elizabeth chairman, Mark Bakker; Rhino Lighting MD, Heather McEwan and Rhino Group MD, Brian van Niekerk

“During our energy efficiency audits of major businesses and retailers, many of the buildings which we go into don’t meet basic energy efficiency requirements. By making simple changes in their daily operations, those businesses have saved tens of thousands of rands on energy costs,” said Van Niekerk.

It takes typically seven years for a landlord to cover the costs of solar installations, said Van Niekerk, adding: “It’s a very good investment. For landlords, when you look at the return on investment, you can protect yourself by having renewable energy to cover you in case tenants default – plus you’re greening the building for the tenant.”

McEwan, whose company also undertakes energy audits for major companies, said one recent audit revealed that a medium-sized retailer could save more than R12,000 annually – or reduce their carbon dioxide

emissions by 10 tonnes – simply by changing the setting on the air conditioning system from 18°C to 22°C.

SAPOA Port Elizabeth chairman Mark Bakker said while the perceived cost of developing a green building has always appeared to be prohibitive, “one needs to take into account not only the direct savings that will be made by using alternate sources, but also the indirect benefits that will be gained through higher achievable rentals, longer term and happier tenants”.

“Property owners need to explore the ‘going green’ avenue, not only because government is implementing requirements or because ‘it’s the right thing to do’, but also because in the longer term they will benefit from happier tenants,” said Bakker.

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