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Go green for your future

Decreasing your practice’s CO2 output would be a wise, pre-emptive move to protect your practice’s future selling power. Andy Acton explains

Whatever their personal ‘green’ credentials, most dentists will have heard talk of the Copenhagen climate summit in recent months. But whether you’re a bona fide eco warrior, or you believe that climate change is all just a load of hot air, all practitioners had better sit up and take notice. Decisions that emerge from these talks will affect us all, and the energy efficiency of all commercial properties is now in the Government’s firing line.

Since October 1 2008, all commercial buildings more than 50 square metres require, by law, a commercial Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) whenever they are built, modified, rented or sold. According to The Carbon Trust, this is simply not enough if we are to hit the Government’s target to reduce CO2 emissions 80 per cent by 2050. Now, the Trust is calling for a massive drive to improve the energy efficiency of commercial buildings, including the imposition of national minimum standards to improve the energy efficiency rating of buildings from grade E to grade C by 2020, and to grade B by 2050.

Inefficient properties
The UK has one of the oldest and least energy-efficient building stocks in Europe, accounting for nearly half of the UK’s carbon emissions. Many dentists will be working in these energy-inefficient properties, and if the Carbon Trust’s calls do not fall on deaf ears, practitioners will have to prepare themselves for making some substantial practice alterations. But if all this sounds like too much hard work and expense, especially with so many infection-control regulations coming into effect (a contentious issue in themselves), practitioners should also consider the benefits the EPC can bring to their dental practice.

All commercial properties need them, but there are some specific exceptions, details of which can be found in the Government’s guidance documentation. EPCs must be provided in the sales literature for the property, and as such, they act as a caveat for improving the energy efficiency of a building.

Asset ratings
The EPC shows the energy efficiency of a building as an ‘Asset Rating’ in bands from ‘A’ for most efficient, to a less efficient ‘G’ rating. The certificate also gives a numerical indicator of energy performance for each building based on its standardised use. A Recommendation Report is produced as part of the EPC process – a computer-generated document listing recommended changes that could improve the asset rating. An Energy Assessor can provide advice and guidance on how best to improve asset ratings, following an assessment of the property.

Most business owners are deterred by the process of obtaining an EPC. A software model calculates the property’s energy performance, using data captured from a site inspection, drawings, specifications and manuals. A ‘zone matrix’ is then created for each floor, which takes into account heating, cooling, lighting and ventilation. This, together with the shape and size of each floor and zone, are entered into the software model, together with details of the buildings construction materials. The energy model is generated using the Simplified Building Energy Model (SBEM) which is a tool approved by the Government for this purpose.

The main advantage for practice principals that The Carbon Trust wants to promote is that better ratings translate into higher perceived value in a market that is increasingly environmentally conscious. By installing more energy-efficient lighting, better insulation and modern boiler systems that improve a building’s efficiency, in theory, dentists should experience shorter void periods and higher income for sale prices.

The UK has one of the oldest and least energy-efficient building stocks in Europe’

‘A wise move’

Given the pressure on the Government to get cracking on their carbon reduction commitment, decreasing your practice’s CO2 output will be a wise, pre-emptive move to protect your practice’s future selling power. For those practitioners who want to take things to the next level of sustainability, the next stage is to implement low and zero carbon technologies. With fuel costs rising, the viability of these improvements is increasingly easy to justify in financial terms.

With an EPC, the potential buyers or tenants will be able to get an impartial report of the likely running costs energy use and the likely costs of the existing building. This makes it easier to compare the likely energy costs of occupying seemingly similar buildings. A commercial EPC will also allow sellers and landlords to gain an insight into the areas where energy performance and efficiency could be improved within their property.

However, whether or not the practice’s value really does increase along with its ratings, the dentist has no choice but to have their surgery rated and logged on to the Government’s central database, as a commercial EPC is always required before you can lawfully complete the sale or lease of a non-commercial property. Fines for the failure to produce an EPC can be anything from £500 to £5,000 depending on the property’s sale price.

Buying or selling a dental practice is a task not to be undertaken lightly, with many potential stumbling blocks on the way. The addition of the next stage is to consider the dimension to selling commercial property only serves to make matters that little bit more complicated.

About the author
Andy Acton is director of Acton & Associates, independent valuers and consultants to the dental profession. Andy has been a member of the British Association of dental specialist banks develop their services to the dental profession, including NatWest and Bank of Ireland. For more information, call 08456 125433, email team@b-associates.com or visit www.b-associates.com.

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