

Hospital Energy Efficiency Gets Some Help From Capitol Hill

Published on **26 Sep 2012**

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Spectrum Health - Lemmen-Holton Cancer Pavilion in Grand Rapids, MI. URS Corporation. Photo credit: Hedrich Blessing

If you were asked to visualize your ideal place for healing from illness or injury, what comes to mind? A peaceful, bright space with lots of daylight? Beautiful views of nature or access to the outdoors? Plenty of room for visiting family and friends? A comfortable setting where you aren't too hot or too cold?

Today's state-of-the-art hospitals strive to meet these patient needs while also incorporating the technology infrastructure to provide the most cutting edge patient care. But it's getting harder and harder as our hospitals operate on leaner and leaner budgets. Greener hospitals not only help our patients heal, but they help free up operating costs that can be used for better patient care.

But our healthcare buildings need help – something even legislators in Washington, DC have recognized. So many hospitals are in aging buildings in need of upgrades to accommodate new technology and operate more efficiently. The U.S. EPA's ENERGY STAR Program estimates that hospitals spend around \$8.8 billion annually on energy, or about 1-3% of a hospital's operating budget. There's a lot of that money we could be saving through greater energy efficiency and consumption of on-site renewables.

Last week, the U.S. Senate took steps to help non-profit organizations - including hospitals - do something about this problem. Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and John Hoeven (R-N.D.) introduced bipartisan legislation, the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act (S.3535), to provide funding for non-profit organizations including hospitals at 50% of the retrofit costs or \$200,000. Eligible activities include retrofits such as replacing or installing a new HVAC system, installing a new renewable energy generation or heating system or other measures to make the building more efficient.

At USGBC, we are working to help healthcare facilities achieve these economic and health benefits by going green. Our [LEED for Healthcare](#) rating system provides inpatient, outpatient and licensed long-term care facilities, medical offices, assisted living facilities and medical education and research centers the roadmap they need to exemplify leadership in energy and environmental performance.

Funding sources like the one proposed in the Nonprofit Energy Efficiency Act not only allow hospitals to perform vital green retrofits to cut energy use – like those prescribed in LEED – but also help hospitals return those cost savings to their most important focus – patient care.

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