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Ask Trane Experts: Why Every Project is a Decarbonization Project

When you talk to building owners, what are they looking for?

Istiaque: No matter the building size, type or business, many of them are looking for ways to control and manage their buildings better. They want data to see how the building is running, and a better understanding of how building metrics tie to their business metrics.

Are they focusing specifically on decarbonization projects?

Istiaque: It’s a mix. Some are ready to talk about decarbonization, but many are primarily financially motivated and more interested in managing costs by managing energy use. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) brought energy projects to the forefront. In reality, many people have old building infrastructure that needs to be replaced. Necessity is the starting point, and anything else is considered a bonus. That being said, any system upgrade is automatically a decarbonization project due to the improved energy efficiency ratings of today’s equipment.

What do they want the most, and is a new system always the best answer?

Istiaque: Usually they want to manage costs better. Old systems can be expensive to run. But they also know that new systems can help them achieve more than their old system from a strategic perspective, particularly with updated controls and building automation. A better-run building can benefit their business in a lot of different ways beyond the cost savings. Energy efficiency helps decarbonize a building, whether it’s intentional or not. The best solution isn’t necessarily a full replacement. A building owner might think, “It’s all old and has to go,” but data can prove otherwise. By adding an energy meter or controls we can really understand the performance of the existing system and then make an informed plan.

Why should building owners today think of HVAC as a technology investment?

Istiaque: Modernizing controls should be the starting point for most upgrade discussions. In reality, any new mechanical system or equipment is a technology investment today. Everything is smart. HVAC has a “brain” in the building automation system. Things have changed a lot. Talking about upgrading to thermal energy storage or running high-efficiency rooftop units without discussing controls is only covering half the story and delivering partial benefits.

Can new controls be added to older equipment? Is there benefit in that?

Istiaque: Absolutely! Even without a major mechanical change, there is almost always an ability to impact how well the building operates (and the cost of doing so) by looking at controls. Significant benefits can result from running what you have as smart as you can. Bigger investments can come later.