The safety community has an opportunity to broaden its scope of client audits and services to include green building loss control methods. Convincing people to recognize the benefits of conservation efforts reminds me of the difficulty safety professionals have experienced in persuading companies and employees to develop and comply with progressive loss control programs. Can you imagine a time when companies needed to be convinced that they should require their employees to wear safety glasses and hardhats, or a time when “safety belts” were the norm? Progress has been made, and risks have been reduced by implementing and enforcing effective safety and health programs.

The concept of workplace safety and health gained national recognition in the 1940s when President continued on page 8
Harry Truman created a President’s Council on Safety, which brought together industrial leaders of the day to address the loss of lives and disabling injuries suffered during the industrial revolution and the industrial expansion of World War II and beyond. The President’s Council met annually until 1961 and was the incubator for many of the safety and health standards recognized and used today. Insurance companies published and promoted safety and health studies, and several authors introduced safety management philosophies and behavioral science programs to address incident prevention.

Prior to the enactment of the OSHA Act, many industrial corporations and construction companies (Stearns-Roger, Bechtel, G.E. DuPont) established safety and loss control departments to address hazard exposure and reduce costs. Du Pont Corp., in particular, developed and marketed many safety and health programs nationally in the 1960s and 1970s. Long before 1970, international construction companies such as Stearns-Roger, Bechtel and Fluor established safety departments at the executive level with major projects employing senior-level safety managers.

In OSHA’s early days, some managers and employees refused to wear hardhats, safety glasses or other PPE. To sell the idea of PPE, company presidents and executives were often asked to wear hardhats and safety glasses when visiting projects. This idea, as well as enforcement of PPE use, resulted in today’s basic universal acceptance of PPE on jobsites.

Safety and health professionals have been successful in convincing many CEOs that safe work attitudes and a positive safety culture improve quality and production. Today, enforcement of safety programs is more often initiated by insurance companies and the threat of potential lawsuits than by the regulatory arm of states and federal agencies. Many progressive companies go far beyond minimum OSHA requirements because they have realized significant savings in insurance costs, better employee morale, more efficient production and a higher quality of products or services.

When promoted practically, safe work practices will be accepted by employees and management alike. Likewise, when promoted properly, energy conservation will be accepted by business leaders and consumers.

In the 1990s, the White House sponsored a public/private program, the Partnership for the Advancing Technology in Housing, to address energy conservation, renewable resources and new building technologies. EPA and U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) also introduced a voluntary labeling program designed to identify and to promote energy-effi-
cient products. EPA and DOE introduced Energy Star, which required energy-related manufacturers to provide labels identifying energy use and the savings in comparison to older versions.

More recently, U.S. Green Building Council, National Association of Home Builders and numerous states have developed programs to guide and recognize green building and sustainability efforts by industry. Few individuals and/or companies initially pursued this new effort, and technology transfer was slow in gaining a foothold with industry and the public.

Initially, the only groups promoting energy conservation and sustainability were various government-sponsored housing projects (Lowry Air Force Base, new community) and historical groups promoting the preservation and reuse of old buildings. Otherwise, the general public thought energy conservation and sustainability simply referred to how long your car would last or which pair of jeans would get the longest wear. As credibility and new innovations in building materials began to show up in Home Depot and Lowe’s home improvement stores, the public began thinking more seriously about sustainability and energy conservation.

Over the past 10 years, going green, sustainability and the use of Energy Star products began to gain credibility and became viewed as environmentally conscious.

As the public, employees, management and investors began to support this movement, potential hidden benefits became more recognizable and supported. The incorporation of conservation measures has gained more acceptance in the form of composites used for decking, fence posts and structural members. Improvements in solar and wind power have also made sustainability easier and more economical for small business, schools and homeowners.

Conserving water, increasing insulation and incorporating energy conservation methods have gone mainstream and have become more important to a large portion of society. Being conservative or going green is becoming a recognizable benefit for saving energy, sustaining materials, providing fresh air and clean water and sustaining the value of our ecosystems. Without going to extremes, progress can be achieved in protecting the bottom line of industry and society in general by addressing conservation methods.

Conservatives of old were thought to be “out of touch” with reality and not realistic about everyday work and personal practices. With today’s energy crisis, the rising cost of fuel and the drought in many parts of the country, businesses and the public are becoming more receptive to conservation ideas and efforts. While many disagree about the facts of global warming, efficient energy use and conservation of water and the environment are generally recognized as worthwhile goals for the public and industry.

Like OSHA and NIOSH, many regulations and guidelines address how a business can comply with conservation initiatives, such as ISO standards and U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. Safety and health managers, accustomed to planning ahead and identifying potential risk, should be receptive to expanding their horizons to include green building audit programs.

The business community can benefit by taking steps to reduce energy costs and by increasing other environmentally friendly efforts. The safety and health community should welcome the greening of the U.S. into the fold of safety. Without getting into political controversy and myriad regulations, safety professionals have always been dedicated to the conservation of life and to protecting property for the overall benefit of their company and/or community.

Supporting conservation is a natural addition to the many and varied roles within a company, a municipality or government entity for the safety professional. Most audits performed by risk managers and safety professionals already incorporate some elements of environmental and conservation issues and are identified as potential economic drain to the company. Many effective safety and risk managers look well beyond the obvious and constantly evaluate entire operations and systems to help their corporate executive and government or municipal managers promote cost-cutting initiatives.

Conserving energy use, materials and resources makes good business sense, just as following safe work practices makes good business sense. It would not require much effort to incorporate some green or conservation elements into a typical safety and health audit program. The safety and health community believes strongly in reducing fatalities, injuries, illnesses and related costs. Taking additional steps to improve the workplace through a green or conservation audit would not be that difficult. Sample items in such an audit include the type of heating and cooling system, lighting, insulation, water use, types of irrigation and sustainable materials and supplies.

A new high school in Fort Collins, CO, became 60% more energy-efficient than comparable schools and saved $11,000 annually in water use by initiating conservation methods.

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Municipalities and planned communities as well as some large corporations are beginning to endorse the green building concept and are encouraging the use of sustainable materials beneficial to their image and to new business. Improvements in energy costs, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the products we use to enhance our way of life are gaining popularity.

The green or conservation movement is in a similar position or battle that the safety and health community was in 50 years ago—trying to convince those who control the purse strings that changes and improvements can be cost-effective.

Businesses address safety and green building programs separately. An audit that incorporates safety, health, energy, the environment and sustainability is much more efficient and cost-effective than those that address these items separately, and it gives the client a broader understanding of the multiple risks associated with their business.

Safety professionals can be on the cutting edge of this awakening by expanding risk management programs to include a green safety audit or evaluation of facilities and operations. Insurance trade journals have given the green movement some press lately and have indicated the willingness of some carriers to recognize the potential benefits of going green. I compare this to the recognition that a company’s superior and effective safety program warrants reduced premiums and lower costs.

Therefore, if a company is serious about conservation and is willing to be audited on the implementation of such a program, I would expect it to be a much more attractive client due to its efforts to reduce risks and control losses. The program could be an expanded facilities audit and program evaluation.

An expanded audit program would require more time on site to address energy and conservation issues. This additional time would enable consultants/inspectors more face time with clients to show how managing risk is compatible with conservation efforts in evaluating potential losses across the entire business spectrum. A broken window or water leak is not only a potential safety or risk issue, it is a potential energy conservation issue.

The combination of traditional SH&E issues with green or conservation methods is a winner for the risk management community. Expand your jobs to include green, and it will be more beneficial to your employer and/or clients.

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