From growing costs to big savings — thanks to submetering

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SNAPSHOT

Background

- 1,049-unit, five-building co-op complex
- Built in 1960 with one master meter for electricity in each building
- All residents paid the same amount for electricity monthly, regardless of usage

Benefits

- 15% savings in maintenance costs
- Residents only pay for the electricity they use
- Electrical issues posing safety risks were found and fixed

Residents of Park City Estates, a co-op in Queens, NY, had a relatively common problem for apartment dwellers: Each of the complex's five buildings were master metered, so it was impossible to bill residents individually. They all paid the same electricity bill, whether or not they were conservative with their energy use.

When FirstService Residential took over management in 2010, the complex had been experiencing double-digit maintenance charge increases for five years. "It was self-managed, and it seemed that the operating expenses were spiraling out of control," said Aubrey Phillibert, the FirstService Residential senior property manager of Park City Estates.

To lower maintenance costs and reduce building-wide energy consumption, Park City Estates owners decided to upgrade to electricity submetering and give residents control over their electricity use. Now, Park City Estates residents only pay for the electricity they actually consume.

Following the submetering conversion and other energy-saving initiatives, the building cut maintenance costs by 15%.

Smooth switch to savings

The superintendent and the installation team put residents' minds at ease, explaining that there would be no damage to their living space—and reminded them of the upside of submetering. "We showed them how to do a back-of-the-envelope calculation of what we could save them," Phillibert says. All of the communication worked. Despite its large scale, Park City Estates' submetering project proceeded smoothly. Residents are also changing their behavior, and finding even more ways to reduce their bills and their impact on the environment.