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A GREEN OUTLOOK

Markham Stouffville Hospital views sustainability as facility-wide responsibility, one that staff has embraced

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BOILER FOR HIRE

Temporary, portable rental equipment benefits hospital's bottom line, minimizes downtime

By Paul Ingham

For many hospital facility managers, replacing an existing boiler is a once-in-a-career event. The pressure to get it right can be intense, particularly when dealing with older infrastructure. For the team at Memorial Hospital in Orillia, Ont., the key concern was finding a way to properly gut and retrofit the existing boiler room while maintaining uninterrupted operation.

Conservative time estimates suggested the project would take four to six months. However, given the complexity posed by the 60-year-old building's space restrictions, the hospital needed a solid contingency plan.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

The first step in completing a boiler retrofit is to conduct a thorough assessment of the facility. Working collaboratively with the hospital's facilities manager, the contractor and boiler manufacturer determined that

Memorial's existing boiler room presented significant space restrictions, making a standard one-boiler-at-a-time replacement impossible.

After developing performance specifications for the project, the team concluded that a temporary, portable rental boiler was an ideal solution for the hospital's needs.

But why rent a boiler?

A TEMPORARY FIX

Hospital boiler facility upgrades can be costly and difficult. Until five years ago, it involved both significant funding and daunting logistics in order to ensure the hospital remained online and in legal compliance. Historically, hospitals often built new boiler rooms simply because on-site replacement just didn't seem feasible and downtime wasn't an option. (Situated in hospital basements, older boiler rooms contained equipment so

large that the infrastructure had to essentially be built around it.)

Temporary rental boilers fix these problems. They can supplement or replace existing on-site boilers, allowing for renovations, retrofits and replacements with more energy and space-efficient boilers to take place. (Newer equipment often takes up half the space of older boilers, leaving proper room for access and maintenance.) As well, rental boilers can often have the facility back online as quickly as it takes to get the equipment on-site, provided funding and connection points are available.

POLICY UNCERTAINTY

Aging boilers can be especially challenging for older hospitals. All healthcare facilities have fiscal constraints but older ones can also face policy uncertainty. Policy-makers may decide that retrofits are unnecessary because a new hospital is



in the planning stages. Then, a few years later, governmental priorities change and the older hospital may be expected to defer capital expenditure for several years longer than expected.

Here, temporary boilers may be a solid solution. Even in situations of policy uncertainty, hospital administrators and facility managers can ensure their boilers remain up and running. And if a replacement is necessary, no costly expansions are required; the temporary boilers can assume the burden until the work is done or even take the place of the boiler plant and run until the hospital's future is decided.

END-OF-LIFE SOLUTION

Temporary boilers also offer a solution to hospitals slated for replacement. Even when the commitment is firm, building a hospital is a difficult task that is prone to setbacks. If the old boiler is breaking down but the new

building is delayed, administrators and policy-makers can face tough decisions about renovating a building that is already slated for demolition.

These soon-to-be-closed hospitals can save a lot of time and money by arranging for long-term rental boilers. With a few simple alterations — a concrete pad and installation of fixed connection points — equipment can be brought on-site and used reliably and within government guidelines for years on end. They can completely replace the existing facilities until it is time to move. ■

Paul Ingham is vice-president of sales and marketing at Thermogenics Inc., a leading manufacturer of coil tube steam and hot water boilers, steam and hot water systems and related equipment used primarily in industrial, commercial and institutional applications in North America. The company also has a fleet of rental boilers. Paul can be reached at 905-727-1901 or info@thermogenicsboilers.



TIME'S UP

When should facility managers start considering boiler replacement?

Telltale signs include: downtime starts to become a serious problem; regular breakdowns result in increasing reliance on backups; frequency of service calls rises and the time it takes to get back online does, too; more time and money is spent on retrofits as older parts become irreplaceable because they're unavailable or obsolete; and utility companies flag the facility's outsized energy draw.

It is important, however, not to wait until replacement reaches a critical level. Facility managers should work with vendors and consultants well in advance to create emergency plans and solutions without the huge capital injection needed to build a whole new boiler room.

Consultants should also be part of the process early on as they often have knowledge on accessing grants and programs that can help defray the cost of retrofits and upgrades. Activating funding can be difficult and time-consuming as hospitals are complex operations that must answer to both administrators and policy-makers. This can lead to serious delays in emergency resolution.

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