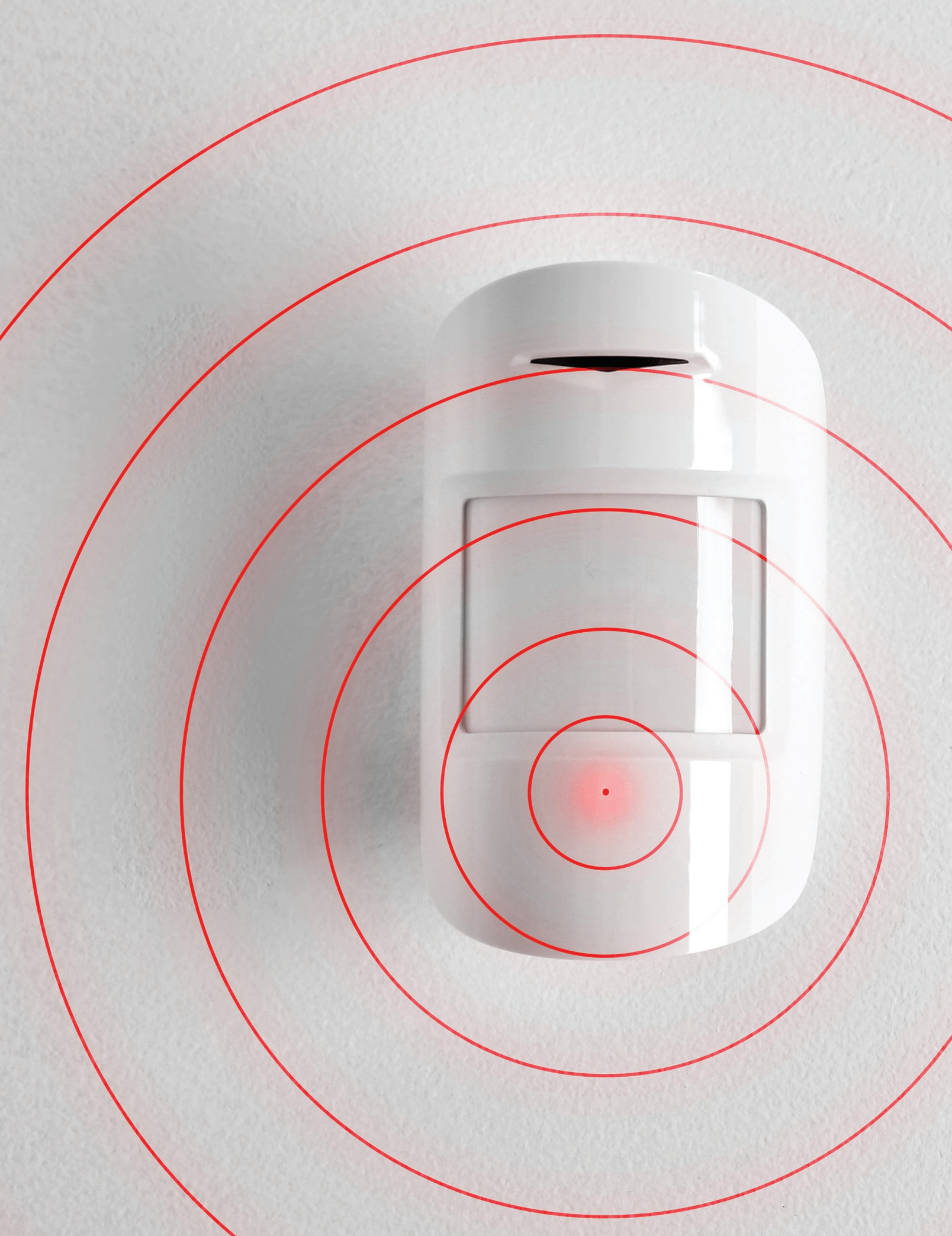

CAMPUS RENOVATIONS THAT ARE NO LONGER JUST *Luxuries*

by Lisa Gibbs, Ed.D.

In the downtime many campuses are experiencing right now, private colleges and universities have the opportunity to make upgrades or renovations to not only increase sustainability, safety, and compliance with ADA regulations, but to also reduce the risk of spreading disease.

A complete inventory of campus facilities is extremely useful when making plans to reopen. Facilities management can use the summer months to analyze where fixtures that reduce the need for touch may already be in place. A plan can be made to upgrade other places on campus with motion sensor lighting, faucets, soap dispensers, hand dryers, and doors.

Exploring Ways to Ensure Health Safety on Campus

Everyday more is being understood about COVID-19, and with that understanding private colleges and universities are exploring ways to ensure public health safety and to mitigate the spread of disease in every aspect of campus life.

Numerous institutions have announced that campus will be opening in the fall and are in the process of planning for the reopening. Broad statements on websites regarding social distancing, adaptation of classroom content delivery, the potential for smaller class sizes, adjusting dining hall procedures, and other contingencies are being considered and will be made public in the next two months. Every department, from residence life to hospitality to facilities management is involved.

A New Reason to Tackle Renovations Now

Facilities management is a critical part of any campus. Along with groundskeeping and regular maintenance services, facilities management executes plans for renovations and new construction.

Much of the more recent renovations and construction projects have been focused on reducing the overall impact to the environment while serving a particular purpose on campus. The United States Green Building Council developed standards for institutions to follow and earn a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy awards an Energy Star seal for protecting the environment through energy efficient products and practices. Some of these guidelines support the Americans with Disabilities Act as well.

Energy efficiency and the awareness of reducing waste is widely practiced on campuses. An Office of Energy and Sustainability can be found on many if not all campuses. Student organizations focused on the environment and sustainability are popular. Recycle bins are commonplace, and the use of bicycles and scooters is growing in popularity.

Reducing Energy Costs while Increasing Safety

Solar panels, green roofs, and water recycling systems can be found on some campuses as efforts to increase sustainability. Additionally, the use of LED lights, motion sensors, and key cards reduces energy cost and increases safety.

The accelerating concern for campus sustainability and safety has led to resourceful technologies being utilized. One of the most widespread technologies is sensor controls, particularly in lighting.

Motion sensor lighting is widely known to reduce energy consumption, precisely because motion sensors detect when movement occurs in a room and automatically turn on and turn off lights accordingly.

Motion sensors reduce the need to search for a light switch upon entering a room, just as they alleviate the responsibility for turning off the light as one exits a room. Nearly every area that uses artificial lighting on campus can benefit from both the efficiency and safety of motion sensor lighting.

Key cards and automatic doors can greatly increase safety on campus. Key cards are programmable to allow or not allow entry, and data is collected with every swipe. Entire buildings or portions of buildings can be quickly locked down in an emergency situation. In some instances, key cards are also connected to automatic doors. These technologies now serve an additional purpose—reducing the risk of disease spread through touch.

Hands-Free Bathroom Fixtures and Lighting

Motion sensors are not limited to lighting. Consider campus restrooms. How can lighting and bathroom fixtures be adapted to increase efficiency? The light comes on as you enter a room, and turns off when all activity has ceased.

Automatic flush and low flow toilets decrease water consumption. Motion sensor soap dispensers deliver measured amounts of soap. Sensors on faucets eliminate the need for using handles to turn water on and off. Sensors on hand dryers replace the need for paper towels.

The path toward energy efficiency now has an added benefit – hands-free utility. In the shakeup of the planet that is COVID-19, hands-free utility is more important than ever. Eliminating the need to touch light switches, faucet handles, flush handles, and other surfaces in public spaces not only saves energy, it also can reduce the spread of disease.

When campuses first responded to the outbreak, students were notified of procedures and guidelines through newly created webpages dedicated to COVID-19 information. These pages reiterated the personal hygiene practices published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Practices that can reduce the risk of contracting disease include covering coughs or sneezes, not touching one's eyes, nose, and mouth, increasing the frequency of hand washing, and regularly disinfecting high touch surfaces.

Campuses that already have motion sensor fixtures in bathrooms, hallways, and classrooms are one step ahead in combating the risk of spreading disease.

Doors and Key Cards Increase Safety in All Ways

Key cards and automatic doors can greatly increase safety on campus. As previously noted in PUPN, key cards are programmable to allow or not allow entry, and data is collected with every swipe.

Entire buildings or portions of buildings can be quickly locked down in an emergency situation. In some instances, key cards are also connected to automatic doors. These technologies now serve an additional purpose—reducing the risk of disease spread through touch.

Many of these technologies also support the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For example, an ADA compliant restroom would have soap dispensers, faucets, and hand dryers that are easily operable with one hand.

Motion sensors make these types of hardware even easier to operate. Automatic doors in public entrances also provide easier access. Where doors are not automatically opened, handles with levers are ADA compliant. Handles with levers instead of round knobs are easier to operate, and can be operated with an elbow to limit potential exposure to disease transmitted by touching an infected surface.

Reducing Risk of Spreading Disease

A complete inventory of campus facilities is extremely useful when making plans to reopen. Facilities management can use the summer months to analyze where fixtures that reduce the need for touch may already be in place. A plan can be made to upgrade other places on campus with motion sensor lighting, faucets, soap dispensers, hand dryers, and doors.

Most campuses likely already have all, if not most, of these renovations and upgrades somewhere on their "Wish List." Other items may have been taking priority, as budgetary decisions were made each semester. As we prepare for students to return to campuses, these improvements are no longer a luxury—but a necessity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: PUPN staff writer Lisa Gibbs earned her Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration in 2018. She is an advocate for arts, particularly dance, in education and for increasing the financial well-being of artists through financial education.

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