



## Another Lobby May Get Air Conditioning

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Topic: [Demand/Consumption](#)

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I live in a building with 195 apartments atop two stories of stores. Built in 1888 as an early coal-fired power plant and converted to residential use in 1979, it is one of those hundreds of thousands of New York buildings that predates the air conditioning age by many decades but have been retrofitted for modernity. In an effort to attract tenants, the landlord installed heavy duty window-mounted air conditioners in each apartment. The lobby, staffed by a doorman for 16 hours a day, does not have any air conditioning, so the doormen keep cool with fans. Some of the shops and restaurants have air conditioning and some don't. (The Indian restaurant where I got my lunch today was stiflingly hot, thanks not only to lack of a/c but also because of the kitchen, and all the drink refridgerators that were blowing hot air into the restaurant. People were sweating in there, but no less friendly than usual.)

Via our building's electronic bulletin board at [Meet The Neighbors](#), residential tenants have started talking about a drive to install an A/C in the lobby. It seems to be driven not by a desire to keep cool while passing through the lobby, but by that quintessential New York democratic impulse to improve the working conditions of the working class staffers.

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One tenant writes, "I think its a disgrace for people having to work under these conditions." Another says, "I completely agree that the doormen need a/c down there. Surely it is a health and safety violation that they should have to work in those temperatures." Bearing witness to how powerful conditioning's temptation is, *tenants are offering to voluntarily increase their rent* as a way to finance acquisition of the required a/c unit and the electricity charges to run it.

There does seem to be a degree of inequity between we yuppie tenants enjoy air conditioning while the Hispanic outer borough working class guys in the lobby have to suffer through the heat all day. At the microscopic level, energy consumption not being an issue, installing A/C in our building lobby is the right thing to do. But millions of micro-level decisions are what are causing our energy crunch and hastening our reckoning with a depletion of fossil fuels. At the macro level, the more important thing in pursuit of egalitarianism would be to figure out a way to get the tenants OFF of A/C rather than putting the lobby on it.

The lights of the Brooklyn Bridge were turned off last night, as were the lights that illuminate the Empire State Building's spire. City government office buildings were put on energy saving procedures, and large industrial operations were halted to save electricity. I gladly complied with an office-wide request to unplug my printer and send all print jobs to the network printer.

As electricity use broke records yesterday, the Times [explains](#) why summertime electricity use is rising so much faster than the population: an ever-rising percentage of our interiors are being air conditioned.

In 1978, 56 percent of American households had air-conditioning. By 2001, the most recent year for which government statistics were available, that figure had risen to 77

Meanwhile, as the risk of blackouts and brownouts increases, my well-meaning neighbors are pushing to cool one of the last un-air conditioned spaces in our building.

As the climate gets hotter, more people will push to have air conditioning, which will send global warming gases into the atmosphere at a faster rate, creating a self-reinforcing heating cycle so long as energy supplies hold out.

You will never be able to air condition people who work outside, and there are plenty of people with jobs that are hotter than my doormen's. And for as long as there have been doormen in our building, they have been hot. But if I argue that we shouldn't install A/C for them, I'll come off sounding like a jerk who hates the working class. There's no forum to introduce people to Peak Oil without sounding like a madman, so I think I'll just sit this one out. We don't have enough power to light the Brooklyn Bridge anymore, but one more lobby will be air conditioned. At least for now.



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