

Green office guide

Everywhere you turn, people are looking for ways to reduce their environmental footprint and act greener—not just at home, but at the office as well. With buildings contributing nearly 40% of the U.S. CO2 emissions, making even small changes at the office can have a dramatic impact. This guide offers practical tips on implementing environmentally friendly practices at your office and how to encourage your employees to get involved and make a difference every day.

THE BASICS

As you introduce green practices at your office, always remember the 3 R's:

Reduce: Energy and resources are consumed to make, sell and ship everything we buy and use. So the first step is to reduce the amount of “stuff” you use in the workplace.

Reuse: Since buying new products isn't always avoidable, be sure to reuse resources wherever you can.

Recycle: Once you have reduced and reused as much as possible, recycle—glass, plastic, metals—anything you can.

COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

Communicating your sustainability program to everyone from senior leaders to all employees is critical to building a successful program. Here are some tips on keeping everyone informed and involved:

- Organize a team of sustainability champions to help build momentum and monitor progress.
- Discuss sustainable workplace issues and practices at your employee meetings.
- Publicize success no matter how big or small the win—it all adds up.

- Create a sustainable workplace notice board.
- Include articles in local office newsletters and other communications.
- Send frequent emails to all office occupants to educate them on ways they can help.
- Include your sustainability initiatives as part of your on-boarding program, job descriptions and in everyone's performance objectives.

WELCOME IDEAS

This guide does not cover every action you can take to reduce your environmental footprint. Be sure to encourage employees to submit suggestions; then implement the ideas that work best for your workplace.

REDUCE ENERGY CONSUMPTION

Energy is used to light, heat and air condition a typical workplace and for running electrical equipment like PCs, photocopiers and printers. Office equipment alone typically accounts for more than 20% of the energy used in most offices and in some cases can account for up to 70%. Here are some easy ways to save energy, making your office more environmentally friendly—and more cost-friendly, too.

Personal Computers

- Don't power your computer system up until you really need it – a personal computer uses about three minutes of running-time energy when starting up. It is far more cost effective to turn it off when not in use.
- A monitor left on overnight wastes enough energy to laser-print 800 pages.
- Switch off your PC system over lunch and whenever you plan to be away from your desk for an extended period of time. Computers have a longer life and use up to 67% less energy if turned off overnight.
- Turn off your screen when you're not using it. Screens are the biggest consumers of energy using 10% of the total energy consumed by the computer even when on stand-by.

Printers

- Switch printers off at the end of the work day if possible. Personal printers should be turned off when not in use for extended periods. Even in standby mode they are consuming energy and costing you money.
- Replacing your printer? Look for good energy-efficient ratings and environmentally friendly features like the ability to print double-sided.

Photocopiers

- Switch copiers off overnight. In larger offices with shared copiers, investigate the installation of software that automatically turns the machine off at a certain time (and then automatically turns it on at a preset time in the morning).
- Make sure the standby is set properly. Whether it is automatic or manual, make sure everyone knows how to use it by displaying a notice on or near it.
- Replacing your photocopier? Look for energy-efficient features but keep in mind that if it takes an exceptionally long time for the copier to warm up after being in standby mode, users will be less prone to activate standby mode. Therefore, make sure the features are also practical.
- A photocopier left on overnight wastes enough energy to make 5,300 copies. For every extra hour the machine is switched off you will save 0.5 kg of carbon dioxide a week.

OFFICE ENERGY USE MYTHS

People often use office equipment in ways they believe are cost-effective and environmentally friendly. However, there are many common misconceptions that actually result in people consuming excess energy. Below are some common myths and the truths behind them.

MYTH #1

Turning computers on and off uses more energy than it saves.

Fact: The energy your computer uses booting up is far less than most people think. Starting your computer uses the same amount of energy as letting it run for three minutes.

Lights

- At night, switch lights off in general office areas. Make sure everyone knows “the last one out turns off the lights” and encourage the cleaners to turn off lights when they are finished. Or, when possible, install timers that turn lights on and off at preset times.
- Take advantage of natural light whenever possible. Encourage employees to open window shades and remove objects blocking light coming into the workplace.
- When natural light is not available, use energy-efficient bulbs instead of standard light bulbs. Fluorescent lamps are the best option.
- Turn off the lights every time you leave a room (office, conference room, etc.). Or install motion sensors in conference rooms and restrooms that automatically turn lights off when there is no activity.
- Angle the lights correctly. If the light comes from the right direction, less light is needed

Heating/cooling

- Adjust your thermostats properly. A one-degree change can save 10 % on your heating or cooling bill while cutting down on energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. Set thermostats between 69 and 71 degrees Fahrenheit for heating and between 75 and 77 degrees Fahrenheit for cooling.
- Ensure that furniture or other items do not block heating and cooling registers. If registers are blocked, the system has to work longer to achieve the desired level of comfort.

Refrigerators and freezers

- Do not leave doors open.
- Defrost freezer compartments based on the manufacturer’s recommendations in order to maintain peak performance.
- Ensure door seals are in good shape. Damaged or missing door seals cause the refrigerator/freezer to work harder to maintain the desired temperature.

DECREASE SOLID WASTE

Paper consumption continues to rise. In fact, a typical office uses approximately 1,000 sheets of paper per month per person. Below are some practical ways to cut back on our unnecessary paper use:

- Email whenever possible.
- Post documents to websites or shared computer drives.
- Keep mailing lists up-to-date.
- Use and reuse internal mail envelopes, including using all the address spaces on internal mailing envelopes. For big mailings, gather used internal mail envelopes from nearby departments and offices to avoid buying new ones.
- Share journal subscriptions with others.
- Contact senders of junk mail (such as catalogs you do not wish to receive) to have your name removed from their mailing lists.
- Use paper already printed on one side for notepaper.

MYTH #2

Turning monitors off is bad for them.

Fact: Although this may have been true at one time, technology has improved greatly. Now a monitor is likely to stop working altogether long before it is affected by being switched on and off repeatedly.

- Use print preview to check the document on the screen before printing.
- Print or copy on both sides of the paper (assuming your printer is capable of printing double-sided).
- Keep one tray of paper in the printer stocked with single-sided waste paper—not all your printing needs to be on a fresh sheet of paper.
- When you set up a meeting, tell your invitees to bring their own handouts rather than printing copies for everyone. This eliminates double printing by the attendees and organizer of the meeting.

Reduce when photocopying

- Only make the copies you need – try to avoid making spares “just in case.”
- Route documents to multiple users rather than sending multiple copies.
- Copy documents onto both sides of the page.
- If you have a large batch to photocopy, run a trial copy first.

Tone it down! Use less ink

- The larger and darker the print, the more ink is being used.
- Use smaller size fonts where possible – especially for drafts.

- Lighter copies use less toner, and that means less cost and fewer toxins on the paper when it eventually gets recycled. When printing or copying, set the image quality to a tolerable “light” level.

In the kitchen/lunchroom

- Refrigerators and freezers (and any other equipment containing CFCs) must be disposed of through a waste contractor registered to deal with CFCs.
- Recycle as many types of materials as possible (glass, paper, plastic, aluminum, etc.). The more materials that are recycled, the less waste gets sent to the landfill.
- Bring your own mug to meetings. If you are hosting the meeting, encourage others to do the same.
- Ask people to use their own washable coffee mugs, plates and utensils.
- Rent or buy durable dishes for meeting attendees. Use washable mugs and glasses for these meetings, too.
- Request non-disposable plates, glasses and utensils when you order catered food.
- Encourage employees to pack their lunch in reusable containers. Plastic containers and a reusable lunch bag are a good combination.

MYTH #3

Screensavers save energy.

Fact: A computer running a screen saver uses as much energy as it does when displaying a Web page or Word document. Most computers use about twice as much energy lighting up the screen as they use for processing. So not only do screen savers use as much energy as a full screen of work, but many require considerable processing energy as well.

- Buy a water filter or water dispenser for use in the kitchen.
- Encourage the use of reusable water bottles instead of single-use bottles.
- Use wooden stirrers instead of plastic.

Reducing packaging

- Reduce the amount of packaging used for the purchases you make by:
 - Requesting that packaging be taken back to the supplier for reuse
 - Requesting reduced packaging by volume or weight
 - Asking for reusable or recyclable packaging or packaging made from recycled materials
- Buy in bulk. This will minimize waste by reducing packaging and the number of trips needed to deliver the product.

RECYCLE AND BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Before starting a recycling program, or expanding an existing program, it is important to understand what materials can be recycled in your area. Check with the owners of your building; they may already have access to recycling vendors. Also, check other local sources to ensure that the materials you are “recycling” are actually being recycled and aren’t just being sent to the landfill in a different truck.

Reuse and recycle

- Recycle office paper, paper products and cardboard by supplying recycling boxes to make it easy for employees to participate.
- Place a bin for aluminum cans in the lunch room and near any vending machines that dispense canned drinks.
- Recycle toner cartridges from copiers and fax machines when they are empty. Many office supply stores will accept them or check with your mailroom service provider.

General waste

- Make sure all obsolete computer equipment and printers are decommissioned through your technology department to ensure the equipment is disposed in an environmentally appropriate way.
- Consider donating furniture, office and kitchen equipment to companies that will resell it as refurbished.
- Most cell phone providers will accept used cellular telephones for recycling.

Buy recycled products

Consider what happens to the things you put in the recycling bin. For recycling to be successful, you also need to buy products made from recycled materials. Buying recycled goods means less waste ends up in garbage landfills and it also means that less energy will be expended to create new products from raw materials.

MYTH #4

It takes a lot of energy to start up a fluorescent light, so there’s no point in switching it off.

Fact: With modern lighting the savings are greater by switching the light off than leaving it on (as long as it will be off for more than five minutes).

REDUCE EMISSIONS

One obvious way to reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions is to reduce the amount of electricity used, since electricity generation is a major source of greenhouse gases. But there are other actions you can take to lower your carbon footprint. Consider the following:

Reduce transport of goods and products

- Buy in bulk. In addition to minimizing waste by reducing packaging, buying in bulk also reduces emissions by reducing the number of trips needed to deliver the product.
- Since transport causes pollution and climate change emissions, buy goods and services from local providers. Buying locally also benefits the local communities economically.
- Purchase goods through your company's established purchasing channels. This helps minimize redundant trips by aggregating product on a delivery.

Lower commuter miles

- Commuting is one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Take steps today to limit the commuting miles of employees in your office and you will be doing your part to reduce global warming.
- Encourage employees to take public transportation (bus, train, subway, etc.). There may even be tax advantages for employees who take public transportation to work.

- If public transportation isn't available, connect employees with their co-workers to set up carpools. Make it easy by setting up a "rideboard."
- Encourage employees to ride their bikes to work. Bikes are the most efficient form of transportation available in terms of energy required to distance traveled.

Travel smartly

- Fly less. Use audio or video conferencing to replace some trips.
- When staying in a hotel, turn the lights and air conditioning off when you leave the hotel room.
- Take advantage of any "green" programs the hotel has, e.g., getting sheets and towels washed every other day.

REDUCE WATER USE

Water is a precious resource and demand around the world is growing as populations increase. It's easy to conserve water if you know how:

In the kitchen

- Wash dishes in the dishwasher only when it is a full load.
- Don't let the water run while you wash dishes in the sink. Only turn the faucet on when needed.
- Notify your facilities manager if there is a dripping faucet.
- Install water-saving heads on kitchen faucets.

MYTH #5

Low-energy light bulbs are more expensive.

Fact: Although the initial cost may be more pricey, low-energy light bulbs last up to eight times longer and use only 20% of the energy of a normal light bulb.

In the bathroom

- Encourage the landlord to install low-flush toilets and water-saving faucets in the building restrooms.
- Notify building maintenance if you find a leak at the faucet, commodes or urinals in the building restrooms.
- If your restroom is equipped with a manual faucet in the sink, make sure you shut the water off while you soap your hands, and then turn it on to rinse them.

PURCHASE RESPONSIBLY

Purchasing practices can have significant and far-reaching impacts, both socially and environmentally. Where we buy products, what they are made of, who made them and what will happen to them when we are finished all need to be considered.

Key questions for making purchasing decisions:

- Do we need this product (or service)?
- Can we meet the need another way?
- Is an appropriate product available somewhere else within the organization?
- Can we rent or share the product, rather than purchasing it?
- Is the quantity requested essential?
- Is the current specification correct for the purpose?
- Can the product serve a useful purpose after its initial use?

If you are putting a contract out to bid, make sure the environmental policy of the bidders is part of your selection criteria. The biggest effect you can have in driving responsible purchasing is by influencing supply chains. It is perfectly legal to include environmental conditions in a contract. You don't need to prescribe what is in the bidders' environmental policy – just ask them what their policy is and what they are doing to reduce their impact on the environment.

To make purchasing at your office as environmentally responsible as possible, try to take the following actions. Also, when purchasing centrally or through national contracts, lobby your facilities personnel to take the same actions.

- Minimize use of virgin and non-renewable materials – buy recycled whenever possible. It's no longer true that products made from recycled materials cost more than products made from virgin materials.
- Purchase environmentally friendly paper, pens, pencils, light bulbs, hygiene and cleaning products.
- Buy recycled paper. Making recycled paper uses up to 90% less water and 50% less energy than making it brand new from trees.
- Buy recycled print cartridges unless the equipment manufacturer recommends against them.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE EVERY DAY

You can make a difference starting today by taking the simple steps outlined in this guide. But this is just the starting point. Share this guide with your coworkers and brainstorm new ideas that are right for your workplace. The little actions you take today will add up to big results. Get everyone involved and start making a real impact every day.