

# Making Your Office Greener

Many years ago, the only things green meant to accountants were money and the color of ledgers. Today, it has new meaning – Earth friendly. A green workplace is defined as one that is environmentally sensitive, resource efficient and socially responsible.

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It is no longer enough to turn a good profit; companies must now demonstrate that they did not make those profits at the expense of team members, the environment or society. Research has shown that a company that goes green enjoys increased:

- Productivity.
- Morale.
- Interest from young professionals looking to join the firm. According to the CSR Monitor by GlobeScan, 70 percent of North American students surveyed said they would not apply for a job at a company deemed socially irresponsible, and 68 percent disagreed that salary was more important than social responsibility. A Stanford University study showed M.B.A. graduates would sacrifice an average of \$13,700 in salary to work for a socially responsible company.
- Retention because of the company's contributions to society.
- Social return via positive public relations.

Going green can be simple. Using these various shades of green as a guide, you, too, can work your way to being Earth friendly in your office or even at home.

## **Kelly Green**

Use a power strip to plug in your computer equipment. At the end of the day, simply turn off the power supply so that nothing is on stand-by mode. This could shave between 5 and 20 percent off your energy bill. At the very least, turn off your monitors when you leave the office, and have computers go into sleep mode after a selected period of time.

Recycle computer equipment. Computers have a number of precious metals in them, which can be a hazard to ground water if not disposed of properly. Toner cartridges now come with mailing instructions to send them back for recycling. Each remanufactured toner cartridge keeps approximately 2.5 pounds of metal and plastic out of landfills and conserves about a half gallon of oil. Many nonprofit companies need computers, and goodwill stores accept equipment as well. Research how to clean your hard drive so that you can safely donate it.

Turn off the lights when not in conference rooms or your office. Artificial lighting accounts for 44 percent of the electricity use in office buildings. Use compact fluorescent bulbs certified by Energy Star; they last ten times longer than incandescent bulbs. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon University's Intelligent Workplace Design Studio found that lighting improvements costing \$370,000 saved almost \$700,000 in energy and operating costs for a typical workplace. Such workplaces increased productivity by 3.2 percent, or roughly \$1,600 per employee, per year on lighting improvements alone.



## **Emerald Green**

Reduce, reuse and recycle. You can vastly cut down on the amount of disposable goods you use. Keep reusable flatware and a cup at your desk. Bring your own lunch, or if you get take out, carry it in a cloth bag instead of a plastic one. One billion plastic bags are thrown away by Americans every year. Get a refill in your travel mug at your favorite coffee shop instead of taking a new cup. Last year, the U.S. went through approximately 50 billion plastic water bottles. Fill up a reusable water bottle at home and bring it with you. Use filtered water if you do not like the taste of tap water. Form a “green team” at work, and ask your company to recycle paper, bottles and other materials.

Make canvas bags work for you. Provide canvas bags to your employees with your firm logo imprinted on them. Many grocery stores provide cash back for using your own canvas bags, as opposed to their paper or plastic bags. It helps the planet and can be an effective company promotional vehicle.

Get off the list. Catalogs are a thing of the past. Chances are you are

receiving many from companies you do not even order from. Call them and tell them to take you off their lists. You are better off getting information from the website or online catalog.

## **Forest Green**

E-fax. You probably get more advertisements and menus than useful information transmitted to your fax machine. E-faxing is a way to receive faxes over the internet and allows you to manage faxes digitally. It saves time, trees, ink and paper supply costs.

Use recycled office supplies, such as chlorine-free paper, recycled garbage bags and pencils made from recycled material. The average U.S. office worker goes through 10,000 sheets of copy paper per year. Recycled paper uses 60-70 percent less energy than paper from tree pulp. Print on both sides of paper to reduce the amount used.

Make sure your cleaning crew uses environmentally safe, organic cleaning products. Cleaning products can be full of toxic chemicals that can make indoor air unhealthy; generate skin, eye and respiratory reactions; and harm the environment. The average American

uses about 40 pints of toxic household cleaning products per year. Ingredients from cleaning products make their way into the environment through various routes: They are flushed down toilets, poured down sinks, sprayed into the air, thrown into the trash and left on the ground. Using eco-friendly, natural cleansers that are packaged in larger, pre-recycled containers help reduce toxins that end up in the air, water and soil, and which can cause significant and irreparable harm to animals, plants, drinking water and food supplies.

A greener workplace means a healthier and more productive environment, a lighter ecological footprint and a healthy bottom line. Whether you're the owner or an employee, taking these (and other) practical steps can lay the foundation for a greener, low-impact existence. And, together, we can have a dramatic impact for the better. 🌱

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