



## CENTER FOR EARTH LEADERSHIP FACT SHEETS

# Taking Green Steps at the Office

---

### SET UP A RECYCLING SYSTEM

Recycling is a good first step because it's relatively easy, it's visible, and everybody participates. A typical office discards one-half pound of paper per person per day. Ask your recycling provider what types of paper can be recycled and how the paper should be sorted. Provide each desk with a paper-recycling container; affix directions about what can and cannot be included. Conduct an education campaign so that everyone buys in and is thoroughly trained.

Once paper recycling is operating smoothly, move on to other materials. Do a walk-through of trash receptacles to see what recyclables are present. Call your local solid waste official to see what items are collected, how they should be prepared, and what kind of receptacle to use.

If there are items that can be recycled somewhere in the community—like plastic tubs, batteries, or food waste—check with staff to see if anyone is willing to transport them on a regular basis. When your recycling program is handling most of what the staff discards, consider removing the waste baskets from each desk and placing them in central locations.

### TURN OFF MACHINES

The easiest way to save energy in the office is to turn off equipment when not in use. Contrary to popular belief, turning off computers will have no significant effect on their useful lifetimes. Today's computers are manufactured to operate normally with several on-off cycles each day. Therefore a general rule is to turn off computers when they won't be used for 1-2 hours and to turn off the monitor if it will be idle for more than 15-20 minutes. See [www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your\\_home/appliances](http://www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/your_home/appliances).

Even more electricity can be saved if a master power switch is turned off at the end of each day. Another option is to plug printers, copiers, and fax machines into a time switch to ensure they are turned off after hours.

### IMPROVE LIGHTING EFFICIENCY



Lighting accounts for approximately 37 percent of energy used in a typical workplace, and many offices are overlit because they were designed before the computer age. An efficient system uses low, general illumination overhead with task-lighting at each work station. In addition, older T-12 fluorescent bulbs and obsolete ballasts can be replaced with T-8 bulbs and efficient, flicker-free electronic ballasts. Another approach is simply to remove bulbs in areas that are overlit. If your space is subject to variable lighting levels, install

dimnable ballasts to reduce artificial light when it isn't needed. Any incandescent bulbs can be replaced with compact fluorescents, which generally use one-quarter of the energy and last ten times as long. Timers can be installed to shut off all lights at night and weekends. Taking such measures can not only save 20-30 percent of lighting energy but also reduce cooling needs because efficient lights give off less heat.

In addition, employees should be instructed to turn off lights when leaving a room. Even though frequent switching may shorten the life of fluorescent lights, the energy savings generally makes turning off the light worthwhile. At the end of their life, fluorescent bulbs should be recycled since they contain tiny amounts of mercury.

### **REDUCE PAPER USE**

While recycling is important, reducing paper use actually saves more resources: trees, water, and energy. Having copiers and printers set for double-sided copying, or instructing all employees on how to duplex may be the single most important step that can be taken. For feedback on paper reduction, post a bar chart by the copier showing how much paper is used each month. Another step, which takes a bit more effort, is reverse draft printing. Have collection boxes for paper used only on one side, and use the paper for creating notepads or for printing in-house documents. Some offices dedicate one printer or one tray of a printer for reverse draft printing. Other common sense practices are to make only the number of copies you need and read drafts on the monitor instead of printing them.

### **BUY RECYCLED**

Recycling works only if there's a demand for recycled products. Your office can help create that demand. Start with copy paper and letterhead and, when you are comfortable, include all your paper products. Call your supplier and order the highest post-consumer recycled paper you can afford. Many offices are using 100 percent. "Post-consumer" means that the fiber has reached the consumer and been returned to the manufacturer through recycling programs. "Recycled" paper may contain fiber that has never left the manufacturing plant. When you use a copy or printing service, request recycled paper.

### **USE GREEN CLEANERS**

Many commercial cleaning products contain toxic chemicals that are not only harmful to the environment but also to the health of employees in enclosed spaces. Contact your janitorial service or building manager and ask what criteria are used in selecting cleaning products. Ask for products that are certified by a third party, such as Green Seal ([www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)), or meet the EPA Design for the Environment standard ([www.epa.gov/opptintr/dfe](http://www.epa.gov/opptintr/dfe)).

### **ELIMINATE DISPOSABLES**

If your lunchroom has a dishwasher, it's easy to switch to durable plates, bowls, and utensils. Provide each employee with a ceramic mug, and have some glasses and mugs for guests. It's possible with just a sink but requires a little more employee dedication. Even cloth napkins and towels can be supplied as long as someone agrees to take them home for washing. A microwave and refrigerator can make it convenient for employees to bring their own lunches rather than frequenting a fast-food cafeteria that uses disposables. If your office provides lunches for meetings, select vendors that are willing to serve family style with returnable platters or that use

only paper wraps. Plastic containers that head to the landfill don't decompose into benign materials. Provide a pitcher of water or juice to avoid individual beverage bottles.

### **PROVIDE COMMUTER INCENTIVES**

Some offices that have had environmental audits determined that commuting had the largest impact. Perhaps the most important incentive is to eliminate free parking. Consider providing subsidies for the employees who choose to ride mass transit. To encourage bicyclers, provide a secure place to park bikes and cover the cost of an annual tune-up. Set up a rideshare program that matches riders and drivers who live near each other, or educate employees about community carpool programs. An incentive could be free- or reduced-rate parking. Some offices provide a bike, a hybrid vehicle, or bus tickets for use by anyone on staff during the day so that no one feels compelled to drive a car to work.

For conferences, explore teleconferencing equipment. If airplane travel is required, consider purchasing offsets for the carbon emissions from a third party like The Climate Trust.

### **REUSE RATHER THAN BUYING NEW**

Many laser printers and photocopiers use toner cartridges that can be recharged. Look in the Yellow Pages under Computer Supplies. Rechargers disassemble the cartridge, replace worn or broken parts, clean everything, and refill the cartridge with toner. Some rechargers provide free pick up and delivery and still charge less than the cost of a new cartridge. Another option is to purchase your cartridge from a manufacturer that pays for return of the cartridge.

Establish a convenient reuse center in your office supply section to make reusing supplies, such as binders, file folders, and paper clips, simple for the person depositing an item for reuse and for the person looking for supplies.

### **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TENANT IMPROVEMENTS**

Tenant improvements or a move to new space provide additional opportunities for greening your workplace. You may want to select materials that are (1) locally manufactured, (2) durable (such as wood, tile, or linoleum rather than carpet), (3) low-VOC emitters (like some paints and adhesives), (4) made of salvaged or FSC-certified wood, (5) rapidly renewable (like bamboo flooring or wheatboard cabinets), or (6) made with recycled content (like ceiling tiles). Be sure to tell the building manager and contractor that you want old building materials recycled. To save electricity, one of the most important first steps might be to sub-meter your space so that employees are aware of office consumption and the impact of conservation measures (also, see the section above on lighting). To save water, replace or upgrade toilets and faucets to exceed current code. Instead of throwing away old equipment, explore reuse opportunities in your community. And if purchasing new equipment, make sure it has an Energy Star label for energy efficiency.