

10 ways to green your business & save money

Going green at work is about being economical – reducing consumption, re-using to avoid wastage and recycling old into new. It doesn't have to cost the earth... in fact greening your workplace could actually save you money and reduce your business overheads.

Regardless of whether you run a home-based office, or lease or own commercial premises, the start of the new year is a great time to review your environmental performance and adopt new habits like cutting paper waste, reducing energy use, implementing a recycling program or adopting a sustainable purchasing policy.

Creating a greener office can result in a healthier and more productive place to work, a lighter ecological footprint, increased staff morale and good news for your bottom line.

Here are some simple tips that will help reduce your business's environmental impact.

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1. Reduce your power bill

Start by thinking about energy efficiency and power consumption.

Many office computers never get switched off, needlessly consuming energy overnight and on weekends. A computer left on all day, every day uses 1000 kilowatts of electricity over a year, producing more than a tonne of carbon emissions.

Rather than use a screensaver on your laptop or PC simply put your computer to sleep if you'll be away from your desk.



This reduces energy use to about 5% of full operating power. Next time you're replacing office computers, remember that laptops and notebooks use up to 90% less energy than a desktop PC.

Switching from conventional light bulbs to energy-efficient compact fluorescents can be one of the most effective things your business can do to reduce emissions and cut your energy bill.

Simply adjusting the thermostat on your heating/cooling system or switching off appliances that use standby power can also conserve energy and save you money.

Greenpeace launched the Green Electricity Guide website (greenelectricityguide.com.au), which ranks the green credentials of electricity providers across each state.

Although 85% of our electricity still comes from coal- and gas-fired power stations, your business can save tonnes of emissions a year by switching to renewable sources such as solar, wind and geothermal energy.

GREEN TIP Save about \$100 per year off your energy bill for every computer you switch off at the end of the day.

2. Reduce paper waste

We can reduce our reliance on wood-chipped forests by purchasing tree-free

paper or stationery made from 100% post-consumer recycled paper.

Cloud-based bookkeeping and digital file storage reduce the amount of paper used for record keeping.

GREEN TIP Save on paper costs by adjusting your printer or copier settings to print both sides.

3. Reduce water use

Reduce your water bill and save natural resources by fixing any dripping taps and installing a dual-flush toilet or water-efficient showerhead.

Every year, billions of litres of fresh drinking water are wasted in urinal flushing. Converting an existing urinal to waterless can save over 150,000 litres of water per year without compromising hygiene.

4. Save resources by recycling & composting

Separation at the source is essential to increasing the amount of waste collected for recycling. By simply separating out the things you throw away and allowing them to be recycled, you not only save valuable virgin materials but you help create new resources. In fact, you'd be surprised at the number of products that can be manufactured from recycled materials.

Implementing a recycling-waste station is as simple as training your team to sort by the colours. Batteries and toner cartridges are also important to recycle.

Finding the nearest place to drop off your recyclables is easy thanks to Planet Ark's website (recyclingnearyou.com.au). Simply enter your postcode to locate your nearest drop-off point.

5. Buy sustainable office supplies

Most office consumables have a greener alternative.

Look for products that are reusable, biodegradable, compostable or recyclable at the end of their useful life. Choose products that contain post-consumer recycled content (the higher the percentage the better); are manufactured from renewable resources or recycled waste materials that have been diverted from landfill; or create fewer greenhouse-gas emissions to produce.

Buying Australian-made products reduces the carbon kilometres in transportation from manufacturer to consumer.

Green certifications from organisations such as Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA) or Forest Stewardship Council Australia (FSC) can provide confidence that the product meets ethical and sustainable standards.

6. Use non-toxic cleaning products

The cleaning chemicals and air fresheners we use can affect the air quality we breathe in, particularly in office buildings where windows are seldom opened, and whatever goes down the drain can pollute our waterways and harm our aquatic life.

When it comes to cleaning liquids, dishwasher powder and hand soaps, choose non-toxic and therefore help protect human health, biodiversity and habitat.

Check the Safety Data Sheet (previously called Material Safety Data Sheet; see safeworkaustralia.gov.au) for toxic nasties and seek out products that do not contain SLS or SLES, palm oil, petrochemicals, phosphates or chlorine, and have no harsh fumes or chemical residues.

There are some great Australian-made cleaning products on the market that are derived from natural plant-based ingredients, are concentrated, have no

fillers and contain no palm oil or palm-oil derivatives.

7. Avoid single-use catering supplies

Whether you run a cafe, coordinate public events or host meetings from time to time – it's likely that you'll need catering supplies at some point in your business.

If it's necessary to purchase single-use, disposable catering supplies – such as coffee cups, water-cooler cups, plates, cutlery, napkins or takeaway containers – choose compostable or recyclable products wherever possible.

GREEN TIP Substitute disposable, polystyrene cups with compostable coffee cups made from plants, not oil. They consume substantially less energy to

Organisations like Climate Friendly (climatefriendly.com) make the process easy with an online carbon-footprint calculator to calculate the greenhouse gas emissions generated by your daily business activities like electricity use, air flights, car travel, waste – and provide carbon-offset packages for both personal and business use.

10. Create a sustainable purchasing policy

Environmentally preferable products (and services) are less damaging to human health and the environment than comparable products.

Adopting a business-wide purchasing policy that encourages sustainable purchasing practices in your organisation will help ensure that green efforts do not fade with employee turnover.

These days, many organisations are actively seeking out business partners and suppliers that share their commitment to the environment.

manufacture and go back to mother nature when composted.

8. Bring plants indoors

Many people do not know that air pollution is almost always higher indoors than outside.

Plants help improve indoor air quality by absorbing airborne pollutants, radiation from computers, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) outgassing from petroleum-derived furnishings and fittings – while replenishing oxygen levels.

Studies show that indoor plants can also benefit health and wellbeing, and improve productivity and performance in the workplace.

9. Purchase carbon credits

It's impossible to conduct your business activities without some environmental impact. Emissions that can't be avoided (for example transportation, website hosting or the staging of an event) can be measured and offset through the purchase of carbon credits.

In addition to clearly defining your business's environmental goals, such a policy can also be of value to investors, who are increasingly viewing environmental policies as evidence of long-term planning and responsible risk management. These days, many organisations are actively seeking out business partners and suppliers that share their commitment to the environment. Outlining your environmental policy on your website is a great way to communicate your ethics and green credentials to your target market.

To find green suppliers, ECO-Buy is a Melbourne-based, not-for-profit organisation that provides sustainable procurement advice and support based on international best practice. Its website ecobuy.org.au provides sources of environmentally preferable products and services in Australia.

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