Go Green at Work

A greener workplace can mean a lighter ecological footprint, a healthier and more productive place to work, and good news for the bottom line.

Here are some practical eco-ideas to implement at work:

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An Ekotribe Initiative

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1. Optimise your electricity needs.

Artificial lighting accounts for 44 percent of the electricity use in office buildings. The simple act of moving your desk towards a window helps cut down electricity use, saving money and the environment. Make it a habit to turn off the lights when you're leaving any room for 15 minutes or more and utilize natural light when you can. Make it a policy to buy Energy Star–rated light bulbs and fixtures, which use at least two-thirds less energy than regular lighting, and install timers or motion sensors that automatically shut off lights when they're not needed. One 100 watt light bulb left on for one hour every day consumes 36.5 kilowatt hours of energy per year. Multiply that by the millions of lights left on every day, and it's obvious that a simple way to reduce energy dependency is to simply turn lights off when they are not needed!

2. Maximize computer efficiency

Computers in the business sector unnecessarily waste $ billion worth of electricity a year. Make it a habit to turn off your computer and the power strip it's plugged into when you leave for the day. Otherwise, you're still burning energy for nothing. During the day, setting your computer to go to sleep automatically during short breaks can cut energy use by 70 percent. Remember, screen savers don't save energy. Make it a policy to invest in energy–saving computers, monitors, and printers and make sure that old equipment is properly recycled. Look for a recycler that has pledged not to export hazardous e–waste and to follow other safety guidelines. Old computers that still work, and are less than five years old, can be donated to organsations that will refurbish them and find them new homes.

3. Print smarter

The average office worker goes through 10,000 sheets of copy paper a year. Make it a habit to print on both sides or use the back side of old documents for faxes, scrap paper, or drafts. Avoid color printing and print in draft mode whenever feasible. Make it a policy to buy chlorine–free paper with a higher percentage of post-consumer recycled content. Also consider switching to a lighter stock of paper or alternatives made from bamboo, hemp, organic cotton, or kenaf. Recycle toner and ink cartridges and buy remanufactured ones.

4. Go paperless when possible

Make it a habit to think before you print. Could this be read or stored online instead? When you receive unwanted catalogs, newsletters, magazines, or junk mail, request to be removed from the mailing list before you recycle the item. Make it a policy to post employee manuals and similar materials online, rather than distribute print copies. They're easier to update that way too.

5. Ramp up your recycling

Make it a habit to recycle everything your company collects. Just about any kind of paper you would encounter in an office, including fax paper, envelopes, and junk mail, can be recycled. So can your old cell phone, PDA, or pager. Make it a policy to place recycling bins in accessible, high–traffic areas and provide clear information about what can and cannot be recycled.

6. Develop a 'green purchasing' policy

Make it a policy to purchase office supplies and furniture made from recycled materials.

7. Watch what you eat

Make it a habit to bring your own mug and dishware for those meals you eat at the office. Make it a policy to provide reusable dishes, silverware, and glasses. Switch to Fair Trade and organic coffee and tea, and buy as much organic and local food as possible for parties and other events. Provide filtered drinking water to reduce bottled–water waste.

8. Rethink your travel

Make it a habit to take the train, bus, or metro when feasible instead of a rental car when traveling on business. If you have to rent a car, some rental agencies now offer hybrids and other high–mileage vehicles. Make it a policy to invest in video conferencing and other technological solutions that can reduce the amount of employee travel.

9. Reconsider your commute

Make it a habit to carpool, bike, or take transit to work, and/or telecommute when possible. If you need to drive occasionally, consider joining a car-sharing service like instead of owning your own wheels. Make it a policy to encourage telecommuting (nice perk that's also good for the planet!) and make it easy for employees to take alternative modes of transportation by subsidizing commuter checks, offering bike parking, or organizing a carpool board.

10. Create a healthy office environment

Make it a habit to use nontoxic cleaning products. Brighten up your cubicle with plants, which absorb indoor pollution. Make it a policy to buy furniture, carpeting, and paint that are free of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and won't off–gas toxic chemicals. Modular components form the core of an environmentally efficient office design. Buying modular furniture helps you mix, match and grow without the need to reinvest in an entirely new look simplifying future purchasing decisions and reducing waste.

If more people "Go for the Green Option" in their daily work life, the positive benefits will multiply. Start by making more personal decisions with the environment in mind. Then help increase awareness by spreading the word to your colleagues, teams, bosses, suppliers and customers. It all adds up!

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