

**An office is a lot like a garden—growing and changing every time you put on your gloves and get down in the dirt. Even before you start planting, you have to prepare the soil (your office). But, what if your plants (your employees) are already in the ground when you realize the soil is toxic?**

**Whether your office is the working hub for seven or 700 people, creating a sustainable environment for your employees is easier than ever before.**

**According to a study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management, 50 percent of U.S. companies have some form of environmental responsibility policy, proving that caring for the planet is becoming a key aspect of “business as usual.”**

**For the other 50 percent, it’s not all that difficult or financially prohibitive to follow the “green” path. These 10 tips are the easiest environmentally conscious actions to take and include options to fit every budget and business size.**

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## **1 REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE YOUR PAPER.**

The average cost of a wasted piece of printer paper is 6 cents. Add to that the fact that each employee will print six wasted pages a day (1,410 a year), and you’ve already lost nearly \$85 per employee, per year on paper alone. Saving money and saving paper go hand in hand. Setting up recycle bins in high-traffic areas, like printer/copy rooms, will help to divert more paper from landfills. However, before that, there are a host of things you and your employees can do to reduce the amount of paper that needs to be recycled in the first place:

- Make double-sided copies.
- Share memos via e-mail instead of printing them.
- Buy paper made from a minimum of 30 percent postconsumer content (although higher is always better).
- Reuse the back of old documents for printing drafts or as scrap paper to formulate ideas and projects. (It’s great for meetings!)
- Eliminate the use of paper plates in the break room—encourage employees to bring spare cups and plates from home.

- Decrease the printing margins in Microsoft Word from 1 1/4 inches to 3/4 inch—it may sound small, but according to *GOOD* magazine, if everyone in the United States changed their margins, we’d save a section of trees nearly the size of Rhode Island each year.

- Install GreenPrint software ([www.printgreener.com](http://www.printgreener.com)) to help eliminate unwanted pages before printing.

## **2 PURCHASE GREENER OFFICE SUPPLIES.**

Pens, pencils, paper clips, staples, organizers, label makers, scissors, correction fluid, rules, hole punches ... it may all seem like small stuff, but it sure adds up quickly. Buying office supplies made from recycled plastics and papers (which are also recyclable after their use) is now no more costly than buying your usual goods from any office products dealer or retailer.

Although office products dealers and the big box stores are starting to carry more sustainable goods, consider also buying from a specialized green office supplier who carries even a larger selection of truly green products. Three of the most reputable and diverse sellers of eco-office

supplies are Frogfile ([www.frogfile.com](http://www.frogfile.com)), The Green Office ([www.thegreenoffice.com](http://www.thegreenoffice.com)), and Green Earth Office Supply (<http://greenearthofficesupply.stores.yahoo.net/>).

## **3 OPT FOR ORGANIC OR FAIR-TRADE COFFEE AND TREATS.**

While you’re shopping around for recycled paper and nontoxic pens, don’t forget to add some green goods for the break room to your order. Organic and fair-trade teas, coffee, sugar, and snacks not only impact the health of your employees, but also the well-being of those who grow and live in the communities where these goods are made.

Newman’s Own Organics, which sells everything from organic popcorn and pretzels to dried fruit and cookies, has donated over \$200 million to charities around the world since 1982. Equal Exchange, makers of organic and fair-trade coffee, cocoa, and teas, sources its goods from small farmers in cooperatives in the Dominican Republic, Paraguay, and Central Columbia, just to name a few. While helping others, your employees will get the chance to enjoy richer flavors and fuller aromas thanks to the absence of pesticides and antibiotics in their daily drinks.

# Don't trade – upgrade!

Nearly all desktops and laptops are built with the availability to upgrade to bigger hard drives, faster processors, and greater memory capacity. Buying one new part and having it installed into your systems is much more cost-efficient and plant-friendly than buying new computers. And remember, whether you're replacing a small part or an entire system, don't throw it out—recycle it.

## 4 CLEAN WITH GREEN IN MIND.

What chemicals you choose to clean with have an impact on everyone's health. Most offices use professional cleaning services, but by providing them (and your employees) with safe products, you'll help reduce the number of headaches and sick days that stem from cleaners with formaldehyde or petroleum-based ingredients.

Dishwashing liquid, carpet shampoo, air fresheners, recycled toilet paper and paper towels, and window and all-purpose cleaners are all available from office products dealers and green office-supply retailers, some with relaxing or energizing scents such as lavender and orange.

## 5 REFURBISHED OR RECYCLED FURNITURE MAKES SUSTAINABLE WORKSPACES.

Chairs, desks, bookcases, and most other general office furniture can not only affect your company's bottom line, but also the size of landfills. Enough furniture to fill all the offices in Boston is thrown away each year, much of which is still functional, save for a few minor repairs. Buying through refurbishing companies saves both money and resources. Open Plan Systems ([www.openplan.com](http://www.openplan.com)), for example, has sales offices in more than 10 cities and is a leader in the refurbished office furniture market.

Looking to buy new? Sourcing from companies that use sustainable wood and nontoxic finishes are the two key factors. It may surprise you to learn that some well-

known furniture manufacturers—including Herman Miller ([www.hermanmiller.com](http://www.hermanmiller.com)), Steelcase ([www.steelcase.com](http://www.steelcase.com)), Knoll ([www.knoll.com](http://www.knoll.com)), and IKEA ([www.ikea.com](http://www.ikea.com))—use recycled materials and low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) finishes and fabrics. Other furniture companies using sustainable materials include EcoWork ([www.ecowork.com](http://www.ecowork.com)), Baltix ([www.baltix.com](http://www.baltix.com)), and Haworth ([www.haworth.com](http://www.haworth.com)).

## 6 SHINE ON WITH CFLS AND LEDS.

Many studies have shown that if businesses would install energy-efficient lighting, even if only where it's cost-effective, \$12 billion a year would be saved on lighting costs, and greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by 7.5 million tons—all for a few light bulbs! Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) are the most common eco-lighting option. Today's CFLs are affordable, versatile, and available in a wide variety of shapes and intensities. If you're looking to add new fixtures along with CFL bulbs, visit Green Culture's Eco Lights store (<http://ecolights.com>) for the widest selection.

More efficient and longer lasting than CFLs, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) are the next step in efficient lighting. North Carolina-based LLF Inc. ([www.llfinc.com](http://www.llfinc.com)) has developed the first commercially available recessed LED light, perfect for offices of all types.

Blessed with a sunny day outside? Simply turn off the overhead lights in the office. You'll enjoy that natural lighting the sun provides and save money at the same time.

## 7 DON'T TRADE THAT COMPUTER-UPGRADE!

Nearly all desktops and laptops are built with the availability to upgrade to bigger hard drives, faster processors, and greater memory capacity. Buying one new part and having it installed into your systems is much more cost-efficient and plant-friendly than buying new computers.

Looking to buy new computers for an office expansion? Go with energy-efficient models as rated by the government's Energy Star program ([www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)).

Whether it's a small part or an entire computer, don't throw it out—recycle it. Computer parts contain chemicals that are dangerous to humans, plants, and animals. Visit Earth 911 (<http://earth911.org>) or myGreenElectronics ([www.mygreenelectronics.org](http://www.mygreenelectronics.org)) for local electronic recycling locations. Some will even pick them up for you.

## 8 PRINT RESPONSIBLY WITH ENERGY-EFFICIENT COPIERS AND PRINTERS AND NONTOXIC TONERS.

Before buying new printers and copiers, research the amount of waste from toner cartridges the machines are likely to produce. Ink jets create the most waste; and although all-in-one cartridges in most laser printers are less wasteful, they contain more plastic, metal, and rubber (vital resources) than ink jet cartridges do. Buying remanufactured printer and copier cartridges is a major money-saving and resource-conscious option.

As of January 2008, Hewlett-Packard began producing its new ink cartridges with recycled plastics from various sources—including water bottles and used cartridges. In just one year, HP has used more than 5 million pounds of recycled plastic, manufacturing 200 million ink cartridges.

Copier and printer manufacturers are taking this green movement seriously, and virtually all copiers these days are Energy Star compliant. While shopping, consider Kyocera Mita's new EcoPro series of printers, made with EcoSys technology that uses long-life toner cartridges, which facilitates a lower cost per print. One of the newest toner technologies, solid ink, doesn't require a cartridge at all. So far, Xerox is the only company to offer solid-ink options with its Phaser models.

## 9 SAVE WASTE, WATER, AND ENERGY EASILY.

Simple day-to-day changes in habits and facilities can lead to big savings. Here are a few tips to reduce waste, save water, and use less energy:

- Turn off all electronics at the end of the day or when not in use—it's more efficient than standby or hibernation modes.
- If available, use the lower power setting on existing equipment, such as refrigerators and heating and cooling systems.
- Fix any possible leaks in faucets and water pipes—one drip can lead to big problems later on.

Most offices always have some waste, but recycle as much as possible. Nearly all plastics, paper goods, aluminum, and glass can be recycled locally. And don't forget those old toner cartridges. More manufacturers and retailers are making it easier than ever to recycle—some even provide you with packaging and pay the postage for you to mail the cartridges back.

# Painting Your Office Green

**Moving into a new construction or just looking to spruce up your current office space? A little paint is all you need. Even painting just one wall in an energizing shade of red or purple can help to motivate your employees. For other reactions, try a shade of green or yellow to boost happiness or serene blue for a calming effect.**

**With indoor air three to five times more polluted than outdoor air, it's important to choose your paints wisely. Low-VOC paints are clear of toxins known as volatile organic compounds. More durable and cost-effective and less harmful to your employees, low-VOC paints are the most sustainable options available. Nearly all major brands have a low-VOC version for sale, including Benjamin Moore and Sherwin Williams. A number of smaller brands have cropped up as well, including Anna Sova ([www.annasova.com](http://www.annasova.com)), Yolo Colorhouse (<http://yolocolorhouse.com/>), AFM SafeCoat (<http://afmsafecoat.com>), and old-fashioned Milk Paint (<http://milkpaint.com/>).**

## 10 CONSIDER ALTERNATIVE WORK-SPACES AND TRAVEL AS WELL AS CARBON OFFSETS.

Now that your office is becoming greener, it's time to consider how all your employees are making it to work each day. Encourage them to carpool or take mass transit to reduce emissions. Also, consider hosting virtual meetings and telecommuting to help both the company and its employees save on travel costs. As well as protecting the environment, you'll need fewer parking spaces, experience less commuting-related stress, and increase productivity and morale. Virtual meeting software can also be used for virtual educational seminars.

Finally, what about those carbon emissions that you just can't avoid, like your monthly heating and cooling bill? Offset the emissions. Reducing your company's impact is always the first step. But, when you come to areas that present you with limited options, using a company such as LiveNeutral ([www.livenneutral.org](http://www.livenneutral.org)), CarbonFund ([www.carbonfund.org](http://www.carbonfund.org)), or TerraPass ([www.terrapass.com](http://www.terrapass.com)) to offset the rest of your emissions will improve your eco-

conscious standing with your employees and your customers.

After using one of their online calculators to determine your leftover carbon emissions, you can offset those emissions for a fee. LiveNeutral will buy energy credits from the Chicago Climate Exchange, which functions as a kind of stock market for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Both CarbonFund and TerraPass will allow you to choose which of their sustainable-energy projects you would like your offset fee to cover: CarbonFund is working on renewable energy, reforestation, and energy-efficiency projects. TerraPass funds clean-energy farm power (making use of animal waste) and landfill gas capture. **S**

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