

# How to... make your *office* more sustainable



This sheet has been put together to provide information and inspiration to green your office. Every workplace has different inputs and wastes, the information in this sheet aims to give you some practical ideas and pointers on the road towards sustainability. Some of the tips on this sheet may be for changes in areas beyond your control, however they could form the basis of proposals to put to an estates department or an institutional or departmental environmental committee.

## Getting the ball rolling

It is likely there are already structures in place for reducing the environmental impact of your office, many institutions now have an Environmental Policy<sup>1</sup> and a member of staff dedicated to sustainable practice:

- review any current policy and consider updating it; keeping up with 'green' legislation is vital; can give a competitive edge and attract students interested in green credentials;
- involve staff and ensure heads of department are on board with any changes;
- keep all meetings and decisions open and consider putting a suggestion box and/or green notice board in the office or departmental common room for staff suggestions and environmental updates; it starts people thinking about the issues and creates a feeling of ownership over any changes; and
- carry out an environmental audit<sup>2</sup> to identify areas that need attention, this will also act as a baseline to record improvements you make.

## Make some changes



**Paper** - large quantities of paper are purchased and often only partially used before ending up in landfill, making this an obvious area to tackle in the office. You can easily reduce paper use by using both sides for photocopying, faxing, and printing, and by using the reverse side of scrap paper for note taking or printing drafts. Almost all paper and card products are recyclable, so set up a paper collection<sup>3</sup>. Think before printing anything out, especially large documents. Paper should be at the very least FSC certified<sup>4</sup> and preferably be 100% recycled thus closing the loop when you recycle the paper from your office.



**Packaging** - purchase reusable or refillable goods wherever possible, avoid disposable items. Put pressure on your suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging they use. Shredded waste paper can be reused as padding in parcels. Envelopes can be reused so always open them carefully, use labels to cover previous addresses.



**Computers and other technology** - due to the complex components that make up PCs, laptops and other equipment,

electronic equipment is difficult to recycle or dispose of safely. There are companies that specialise in doing up old equipment and reusing their parts<sup>5</sup>. Some parts, such as toner cartridges, can be reused. When purchasing new equipment look for energy efficient models<sup>6</sup> that will not be outmoded too quickly.



**Recycling** - provide clearly labelled sorting containers for paper, plastics, cans, glass and organic matter<sup>7</sup>.

Replacing waste bins with recycling bins can encourage people to recycle more. Maybe a member of staff could take organic matter produced in the office (tea bags, apple cores, etc.) for home composting<sup>8</sup> or a composting scheme could be implemented in the workplace.



**Is it really rubbish?** - if your office is undergoing a facelift, make sure that furniture, carpet tiles, electrical goods etc. are donated to charity instead of thrown in the skip. Think about "freecycling"; your waste may be someone else's business venture<sup>9</sup>.



**Green purchasing** - institutions represent a large section of the consumer market, and this is where purchasing power can really make a difference:

- ask suppliers for details of their environmental and ethical policies<sup>10</sup>;
- buy recycled or reclaimed products wherever possible, taking their construction and ease of recycling at the end of product life into account;
- if possible, avoid products that must be shipped from overseas; and
- purchase as locally as you can, reducing transport impact and supporting the local economy.



**Energy efficiency** - switch off electrical appliances when not in use, and check to ensure any power saving modes on office equipment are switched on<sup>11</sup>. A photocopier left switched on overnight wastes enough energy to make 5,300 A4 copies! Invest in low energy flat screens, they save desk space as well as energy, and switch off your computer screen if popping out of the office. Make use of natural light by arranging desks closer to the windows, switch to low energy light bulbs and compact fluorescent tubes, and fit mirror reflectors on twin tube fittings<sup>12</sup>.



**Heating** - staff should be able to adjust the heating in their own office, a central system does not account for localised conditions and staff end up opening windows or having electric heaters to compensate for bad environmental control. Make use of thermostats, sensors, and radiator valves, and ensure radiators are unobstructed. Recommended optimum working temperatures are between 21°C and 23°C during winter and 22°C and 24°C in the summer<sup>13</sup>. Insulation of the building will considerably reduce heating bills and there are green alternatives for insulation products<sup>14</sup>.



**Water** - save water<sup>15</sup> by repairing leaks and fitting water pressure controlling devices on taps. Another simple method is putting a water saving device in the toilet cistern. If refitting washrooms then you could consider installing waterless urinals and low flush toilets. Avoid using bleach and other toxic cleaning products and consider using more environmentally friendly alternatives<sup>16</sup>.



**Green transport plan** - encourage use of public transport and minimise use of personal cars. Make cycling to work an attractive option<sup>17</sup> by providing secure lockups and pleasant changing facilities. Install a transport notice board where car and lift sharing<sup>18</sup> opportunities between staff, and details of local public transport services, can be displayed.



**Tea breaks** - vending machines are wasteful in terms of energy, and produce a large quantity of waste. If they must be used collect the plastic cups for recycling, large insulated thermos flasks are a good alternative. For smaller offices, teapots save on tea and endless re-boiling of the kettle. Introduce fair trade<sup>19</sup> tea and coffee, encourage whole foods and organic produce in the canteen, and home cooked food instead of highly packaged and processed snacks.

## Resources

1. Envirowise, "How to write an Environmental Policy": [www.envirowise.gov.uk/Ref012](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk/Ref012)
2. Greening the Office Online Audit: [www.greenoffice.org.uk](http://www.greenoffice.org.uk)
3. WRAP, Office Paper Collection: [www.wrap.org.uk/businesses/using\\_recycled\\_paper/information\\_sheets/](http://www.wrap.org.uk/businesses/using_recycled_paper/information_sheets/)
4. Forest Stewardship Council: [www.fsc-uk.org](http://www.fsc-uk.org)
5. Waste Online, Computer recyclers and refurbishers: [www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/ComputerRecyclersRefurbishers.htm](http://www.wasteonline.org.uk/resources/InformationSheets/ComputerRecyclersRefurbishers.htm)
6. Defra guidance on the EU energy labelling scheme: [www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/energylabels/](http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/consumerprod/energylabels/)
7. Greening the Office, Recycling Factsheet: [www.green-office.org.uk/audit.php?goingto=factsheet4](http://www.green-office.org.uk/audit.php?goingto=factsheet4)
8. Home Composting: [www.homecomposting.org.uk](http://www.homecomposting.org.uk)
9. Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), SwapShop and Freecycle Information: [www.cat.org.uk/information/pdf/SwapShops.pdf](http://www.cat.org.uk/information/pdf/SwapShops.pdf)
10. Greening the Office, Suppliers and Purchasing Factsheet: [www.green-office.org.uk/audit.php?goingto=factsheet6](http://www.green-office.org.uk/audit.php?goingto=factsheet6)
11. The Energy Saving Trust: [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk)
12. Energy Conservation Group: [www.savenergy.co.uk](http://www.savenergy.co.uk)
13. The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE): [www.cibse.org](http://www.cibse.org)
14. CAT, Insulation Tipsheet: [www.cat.org.uk/catpubs/pubs\\_content.tmp?subdir=catpubs&sku=PUBS\\_20/08&key=ts\\_ins](http://www.cat.org.uk/catpubs/pubs_content.tmp?subdir=catpubs&sku=PUBS_20/08&key=ts_ins)
15. CAT, Saving Water Tipsheet: [www.cat.org.uk/catpubs/pubs\\_content.tmp?subdir=catpubs&sku=PUBS\\_20/08&key=ts\\_wc](http://www.cat.org.uk/catpubs/pubs_content.tmp?subdir=catpubs&sku=PUBS_20/08&key=ts_wc)
16. Ecover: [www.ecover.com](http://www.ecover.com)
17. Sustrans: [www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)
18. Directory on UK car sharing sites: [www.carshare.com](http://www.carshare.com)
19. Fair Trade: [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

Envirowise offers free, independent, confidential advice and support on practical ways to minimise waste and reduce environmental impact for UK institutions and businesses, see [www.envirowise.gov.uk](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk)

## Take pride in your workplace and inspire others to make the same changes

This "How to" Sheet has been compiled by Alzena Wilmot. How to sheets for; practicals, field trips, tutorials and lectures are also available.

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