

Save Money, Help the Environment: Tips for Greening Your Business

Operating a green business is not only good for the environment, but as a business owner, it is good for your bottom line. Conserving resources and reducing waste can save money. Even small businesses can take huge steps toward going green and being environmentally conscious. Your business will be noticed by your community, customers and stakeholders also having an interest in business sustainability. Following are some simple ideas you can use to operate an environmentally friendly business:

- Measure and track your waste. Look at the resources your business uses (energy, supplies, raw materials) and the waste it generates (finished products, packaging, raw materials, energy, emissions). Try to determine and calculate this waste. The assessment could be as simple as determining the quantity of paper used in a day. This will help in efforts to reduce and redesign usage of material.
- Encourage employee participation. Ask your employees for green ideas. Establish an electronic bulletin board asking for suggestions. Consider building a team of employees to promote, track and educate others about green behavior in your company and at home. Develop a system for recognizing employees' efforts to be environmentally conscious; consider offering incentives and rewards.
- Write an environmental vision statement. A vision statement is a great way to show customers, stakeholders and the community what your company stands for, and an easy way for employees to stand behind a written statement. A sustainable vision statement could be as simple as stating your commitment to respect and protect the environment by creating a clean and safe place to live and work, or it could be specific such as:

“As an environmentally aware company, we are committed to exercising all available recycling options; conserving energy and natural resources; reducing waste and the use of toxic or other harmful materials; purchasing reusable, renewable or recycled materials and working with partners who are environmentally friendly.”

- *Electricity:* By changing light bulbs to compact fluorescent lamps and installing new energy-efficient equipment (like heating and cooling units, refrigerators, microwaves, etc.), small businesses can slash about 25-30% off their energy bill. Unplug electrical appliances not in use. If the climate controls are manually operated, turn them off when not needed. Get an energy audit – some utility companies and local governments provide substantial rebates for audits and even offer them for free.
- *Computers:* Upgrade old equipment rather than throwing it away. Set computers to sleep mode after 5 minutes of idle time and power them down at night. Recycle ink cartridges. Consider laptops instead of desktops for employees – a laptop's LCD screen uses a third of the energy of a typical cathode ray tube.
- *Paper:* Reducing default margin settings in Word documents will save a lot of paper in the long run. Using both sides of a piece of paper can cut annual paper usage by 20%. Reuse paper that has only been printed on one side. Edit on screen rather than printing multiple copies. Circulate memos via email. Turn used paper into scratch pads. Avoid fax cover sheets when possible. Use email and voice mail as methods of communication instead of snail mail. Turn old file folders inside out and reuse them. Skip paper paychecks; use an online payroll system. Buy recycled paper. Shred newspapers, used paper and ecofriendly packaging. Use incoming shipping boxes for outgoing packages.
- *Traveling:* Go virtual – set up virtual meetings and presentations instead of traveling to another city.
- Invest in videoconferencing tools and high quality communications equipment. WebEx™, GoToMeeting®, Skype™, iVisit, Click to Meet® and SCOPIA® are some of the popular software programs available for virtual conferencing. If you do have to travel, make traveling environmentally friendly. Consider hybrid cars for company vehicles. Telecommute. Encourage carpooling for employees. Offer incentives for employees who are ready to use mass transportation.
- *Kitchen:* Buy employees a coffee mug and eliminate Styrofoam coffee cups. Stock the bathrooms with natural organic hand soap, detergents and dish soaps. Replace bottled water with a water filter – this brings down the cost of water, and also reduces plastic consumption.
- *Product lifecycle:*
- Look at the 'cradle-to-grave' impact of your goods – from raw materials to the manufacturing, packaging, sale, use and disposal. Think about how your product can be disassembled and recycled, and make this information available to customers with each sale. Reuse manufacturing byproducts by passing on discarded materials to a company that may be able to use them. The Pennsylvania
- Network of Small Business Development Centers' EMAP Program helps businesses find other businesses that may reuse manufacturing wastes or materials through the *Pennsylvania Material*

- *Trader Program.* For more information about this program, log on to <http://materialtrader.org>. One way to reduce the environmental impact of production is to purchase raw materials locally to save on transportation and packaging.
- *Hazardous substances:* Hazardous substances may include copier toner, cleaning supplies, printer inks, dyes, solvents, batteries and other supplies – identify opportunities to reduce the use of hazardous substances or replace them with greener options. Dispose of hazardous substances properly.
- To find out where to dispose of hazardous substances or recycle specific materials in your area, go to www.earth911.com and search by zip code or city, state or visit www.depweb.state.pa.us.