

Top 10 Tips to Go Green At Work

Adopted from Planet Green: *Going Green at Work*



Post-consumer paper and soy ink, sure, but we're also big on telecommuting, online collaboration, and virtual workspaces. No bricks. No mortar. That keeps overhead low, if you catch our drift.

Here's some easy advice for any office looking to green things up.

1. More Work, Less Energy

For many people, a computer is the central tool at work. Optimizing the energy settings for computers and other devices can be more than a modest energy saver. Set computers to energy-saving settings and make sure to shut them down when you leave for the day ("standby" settings will continue to draw power even when not in use). By plugging hardware into a power strip with an on/off switch (or a [smart power strip](#)), the whole desktop setup can be turned off at once (make sure to power down inkjet printers before killing the power—they need to seal their cartridges). Printers, scanners, and other peripherals that are only used occasionally can be unplugged until they're needed. And of course, turn off lights in spaces that are unoccupied.

2. Digitize

It does seem a bit strange that in the "digital age" we still consume enormous amounts of mashed up, bleached tree pulp, most of which gets used once or twice and then tossed or recycled (["downcycled," as McDonough and Braungart would call it](#)). The greenest paper is no paper at all, so keep things digital and dematerialized whenever possible. The more you do online, the less you need paper. Keep files on computers instead of in file cabinets (this also makes it easier to make offsite backup copies or take them with you when you move to a new office). Review documents onscreen rather than printing them out. Send emails instead of paper letters. New software like [Greenprint](#) helps eliminate blank pages from documents before printing and can also convert to PDF for paperless document sharing.

3. Don't Be a Paper Pusher

When buying printer paper, look for recycled paper with a high percentage of post-consumer content and the minimum of chlorine bleaching. Even recycled paper gobbles up a great deal of energy, water, and chemical resources in its processing (toxic pulp slurry is the paper recycling industry's dirty secret). When using the real stuff, print on both sides of the page when appropriate and use misprints as notepaper. Try to choose printers and photocopiers that do double-sided printing. If your office ships packages, reuse boxes and use shredded waste paper as packing material.

4. Greening the Commute

American workers spend an average of [47 hours per year](#) commuting through rush hour traffic. This adds up to 3.7 billion hours and 23

billion gallons of gas wasted in traffic each year. We can ease some of this strain by carpooling, taking public transit, biking, walking, or a creative combination thereof. If there's no good way to phase out your car, consider getting a hybrid, electric vehicle, motorcycle, scooter, or using a car sharing service like [Flexcar](#) or [Zipcar](#). See [How to Green Your Car](#) for more depth on the subject. Some employers are even giving [a bonus to bike and carpool commuters](#) and special perks to hybrid drivers. For those who think bike riding is for kids and tattooed couriers, consider a high-tech folding bike or an electrically assisted one

5. Green Sleeves

You might be amazed how sharp work clothes from thrift stores can look. If you buy new, get clothes made with organic or recycled fibers. Avoid clothes that need to be dry cleaned, and if they do demand it, seek out your local "green" dry cleaner. See [How to Go Green: Wardrobe](#) for more tactics on greening those work duds.

6. Work From Home

Instant messaging, video conferencing, and other innovative workflow tools make effective telecommuting a reality. If you can telecommute, hold phone conferences, take online classes, or otherwise work from home, give it a try. It'll save you the time you would have spent on the trip as well as sparing the air. As a bonus, you get to work in your pajamas. Telecommuting works for 44 million Americans (not to mention the TreeHugger staff). Also, consider the possibility of working four ten-hour days instead of five eight-hour days (a consolidated workweek), cutting the energy and time spent on commuting by 20% and giving you some lovely three-day weekends.

7. Use Green Materials

Some paper use can't be avoided, so use recycled paper and envelopes that have been processed and colored using eco-friendly

methods. Pens and pencils can also be made of recycled materials, and refillable pens and markers are preferable to disposable ones. Use biodegradable soaps and recycled paper or cloth towels in the bathroom and kitchen, and provide biodegradable cleaners for the custodial staff. Buy in bulk so that shipping and packaging waste are reduced, and reuse the shipping boxes. Recycling printer cartridges is often free, and recycled replacements are cheaper than new ones.

8. Redesign the Workspace

Greening the space in which you work has almost limitless possibilities. Start with good furniture, good lighting, and good air. Furniture can be manufactured from recycled materials as well as recyclable. Herman-Miller and Steelcase are two groundbreaking companies that have adopted the Cradle-to-Cradle protocol for many of their office chairs. Incandescent bulbs can be replaced with compact fluorescents and there is an ever-growing selection of high-end LED desk lamps that use miniscule amounts of energy (see [How to Green Your Lighting](#)). Not only is natural daylight a free source of lighting for the office, it has been proven to improve worker productivity and satisfaction (as well as boost sales in retail settings). Workspace air quality is also crucial. Good ventilation and low-VOC paints and materials (such as furniture and carpet) will keep employees healthy (look for [How to Green Your Furniture](#) coming soon).

9. Lunch Time

Bringing lunch to work in reusable containers is likely the greenest (and healthiest) way to eat at work. Getting delivery and takeout almost inevitably ends with a miniature mountain of packaging waste. But if you do order delivery, join coworkers in placing a large order (more efficient than many separate ones). Also, bring in a reusable plate, utensils, and napkins. If you do go out for lunch, try biking or walking instead of driving.

10. Get Others in on the Act

Share these tips with your colleagues. Ask your boss to purchase carbon offsets for corporate travel by car and plane. Arrange an office carpool or group bike commute. Trade shifts and job duties so that you can work four long days instead of five short ones. Ask the office manager to get fair trade coffee for the break room and make sure everyone has a small recycling bin so that recycling is just as easy as throwing paper away. Ask everyone to bring in a mug or glass from home and keep some handy for visitors so that you reduce or eliminate use of paper cups.

And PS – DON'T PRINT THIS!!!! 😊

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