How to ... go green at work

It's a sad fact of life that we all spend so much of our time working. But whether you're in the office, or working out of doors, or on your feet all day, or even pulling the night shift, there are heaps of things you can do to green your workplace.

If you're just starting out, why don't you aim for a few simple things: even the simple things can take a huge weight off our environment. Or, if you're well and truly on the way to greening your office, why not aim high? You won't only be helping our environment, but you'll probably also find that you'll feel better and healthier for it.

Going green at work – starting small

Save the trees! The average office worker uses 10,000 sheets of copy paper a year. Sheesh! Hold back on printing wherever you can, use both sides (who knew?), do your scribbles on scrap paper and always recycle.

E-Waste: it's a nasty beast and it's really piling up. Instead of upgrading just because you can or ditching the wobbly computer bits, see if you can get them repaired. If you need to get new parts, do some research and find the ones that have some sound eco-credentials. And when getting rid of the old, always recycle (visit Planet Ark [planetark.org] to find out where and how).

Recycle! Not just your paper and e-waste, set up recycling bins for all sorts, including plastics and glass, food and drink containers (these should be able to go into your curb side recycling bins), ink cartridges and batteries (check with Planet Ark [planetark.org] about battery and cartridge recycling).

Work from home. We like this one! If you don't need to be in the office, why not work from home and save on the car trip or take the pressure off the public transport system. Or, encourage your colleagues to walk or ride to work.

Green your suppliers. You'll be surprised how many of your suppliers do actually offer some eco alternatives. It doesn't hurt to ask. And if they don't, keep asking until they do or see if you can't get it someplace else. This applies to everything from couriers to stationary (check www.ecoofficesupplies.com.au for some ideas).

Clean green. Ask staff and cleaners to use eco-friendly cleaning products where they can. If it makes it easier, offer to supply them so that both them and you can breathe easy at work.

How to ... go green at work

Get into pot ... planting. Pot plants in the office have the double benefit of making the place look nice (so long as you keep them happy) and keeping the air clean. Clean air means less need for air con which means less energy used.

Switch to green energy. Check with GreenPower (www.greenpower.gov.au) to find out which one would suit your workplace. If making the switch won't work for you then consider offsetting the energy that you use at work.

Head back to the tap. Having big barrels of water lugged in and out every week by the bottled water company and then chilling those bottles is not only unnecessary but a big waste of energy. Most tap water is safe to drink (and you probably won't even notice the difference). If you're not sure about the quality of your water or if it tastes a bit yuk, put filters on the kitchen spouts or buy filtered water jugs and keep them in the office fridge.

Switch it off. Not your brain (although we understand the temptation) but the lights, computers, printers, photocopiers and anything else you don't need humming throughout the night or over the holidays. No one leaves their lights on at home during the night. Why would you do it at work? You'll be saving your office loads of energy and loads of cash.

Think about your lights. As well as switching your lights off you can also switch to eco-friendly CFLs and save even more cash and energy.

Bring your lunch to work. Encourage staff to bring their lunch in, using reusable containers instead of buying lunches in plastic tubs and wrappers that just end up in the bin (hey look, if the kids at school can do nude food, so can you).

Get rid of junk mail. Not just for home, the no junk mail message can be applied to the office too. Return to sender all catalogues or brochures that you don't need and see if you can apply to have the ones you do need sent by email.

Every drip counts. And we're not talking about the people you work with. We're talking about the drips from the taps and toilets. Ask your maintenance person to fix the drips and save your workplace from wasting water.

Put your heads together. Form a committee to organise and monitor your office's green practices, to ensure that your office's green goals don't fall away if one or two committed employees move on, and to reinforce the importance of doing the right thing across the organisation.

coolaustralia.org
Learn for life

How to ... go green at work

Going green at work – aiming high

Power down. Artificial lighting accounts for almost half of all office electricity use. While turning off lights that are not being used is a great start, why not aim high and install motion sensors that do it automatically when no one is in the room.

Eco-Renovate/Build. If you need to start fresh, renovate or upgrade anything, green options abound, including non-toxic paints, natural fibre carpeting, energy efficient windows, furniture and Energy Star-rated office equipment, just to name a few (have a look at www.thegreendirectory.com.au or www.gbca.org.au for more info).

Go solar. Switching to green power is a great leap forward, but switching to your own green power is even better. Installing solar panels is the most well-known and widely used form of alternative energy in Australia, but there are other options available.

Related links

For more information about greening your office, and for links that we find useful please visit the following websites:

Planet Ark: http://planetark.org/

Climate Friendly: https://climatefriendly.com/

Green Building Council Australia: http://www.gbca.org.au/

The Green Directory: http://www.thegreendirectory.com.au/

Eco Office: http://www.ecoofficesupplies.com.au/

coolaustralia.org
Learn for life