

# Realistic Green Strategies for Businesses Today

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**I**t's not easy being green. But anymore, that is hardly an excuse for businesses not getting on board the green wagon by taking steps toward creating an office environment that is both sustainable and comfortable for employees.

A more eco-friendly office environment is not something that happens overnight. Larger-scale changes, such as LEED certification may initially seem unrealistic for businesses to consider. Don't let this deter your efforts. There are numerous steps your business can take to evaluate your office's environmental impact, set realistic goals and reach a level of eco-friendliness.

You may own a small business with a handful of employees. You may not think that your office's carbon footprint is substantial. But small measures do add up over time.

For example, consider carpooling. If every car in the United States carried just one more person, 8 million gallons of gasoline could be saved annually. Your company's small steps will amount to great environmental benefits.

Once you decide to move toward a more sustainable office, map out a plan. This plan should outline practices that both empower and engage your employees' contribution in reducing your office's carbon footprint. Consider the following tips to help you get started with your sustainability plan:

- **Transportation:** Encourage employees to reduce the amount of energy consumption related to transit. This can be done through biking, carpooling or using mass transit. For your company's fleet, support using alternative fuel sources or modify use of existing ones, such as hybrid or electric vehicles.

- **Energy:** Reduce energy consumption whenever possible. Simple changes may include keeping your office thermostat at a constant temperature and using energy-efficient light bulbs. Also, consider the use of alternative energy sources, such as wind, solar or hydroelectric power.

- **Water:** Reduce and reuse. Fix leaky faucets or pipes which can waste up to 20 gallons of water per day. Serve water from a water cooler, rather than plastic bottles. Limit excessive water usage by installing sinks, toilets and dishwashers that have efficiency settings.

- **Indoor Air Quality:** Indoor air quality can be up to 10 times worse than outdoor air, with microbial elements like mold and pollen combining with chemicals found in the office. Make sure your office's ventilation system is clean to prevent allergies, asthma and other conditions. Change your air filters every one to three months and consult your HVAC provider to ensure your system is receiving appropriate maintenance.

- **Office Supplies:** Whenever possible, purchase office supplies, appliances and furniture made from eco-friendly and durable materials. Products that are built to last will reduce waste and your office's carbon footprint.

- **Recycling Program:** Develop an in-office recycling program. Provide incentives to employees to participate.

- **Paperless:** If the United States could cut office paper use by 10 percent, it would prevent the emission of 1.6 million tons of greenhouse gasses (the equivalent of taking 280,000 cars off the road). If your office can go paperless, or close to it, it will quickly benefit the environment and your overhead expense.

- **100% Recycled Paper:** Utilize recycled paper, as current studies show that recycled paper takes 60 to 70 percent less energy to produce than virgin paper. Also, print double-sided when possible, and recycle your incoming faxes by printing on the blank side before placing in the recycling bin.

- **Educate Employees:** Start a company "go green" newsletter or include sustainability tips in your existing newsletter. These tips might include changing to energy-efficient light bulbs, buying locally grown products and conducting an energy audit at home.

- **Staff Involvement:** No matter what your corporate sustainability policies, your employees need to feel a sense of ownership in order for your plan to be successful. Offer prizes or incentives to your "greenest" employee and acknowledge your staff's dedication to environmental issues.

Remember, building an eco-friendly office will not happen overnight. But with the help of a dedicated staff that has a sense of ownership, your business can take steps toward sustainability and helping the environment. Our children and grandchildren will thank us for our efforts.