

Setting Up a Home Office: *Making Environmental Choices*



If you're one of the many Americans with a home office, you know that perhaps one of the greatest benefits is that you're in charge! Whether you run a business, telecommute, take classes, or simply manage household finances, the day-to-day choices you make about office supplies and equipment can have a big impact on the environment. As the decisionmaker, you can make a difference by choosing to conserve resources and reduce waste and pollution.

Here are some simple ideas for maintaining an environmentally friendly home office:

Office Equipment

Working from home can mean using more supplies and equipment than before. Consider the following ways to help save energy and resources:

■ *Buy energy-efficient equipment.*

- Look for the ENERGY STAR® logo when you buy a computer, printer, copier, or other equipment for your home. ENERGY STAR products meet superior energy efficiency standards.

■ *Consider buying an all-in-one fax machine/photocopier/printer/scanner.*

- Evaluate all-in-one options to learn how you can save money and resources by purchasing one machine instead of four.



■ *Select printers that will accept remanufactured toner cartridges.*

- Recycle used toner cartridges or return them to the manufacturer via a "take-back" program.
- Recharge refillable toner cartridges to prevent waste.

■ *Make your printer environmentally friendly.*

- Choose a "duplex" printer that prints on two sides or set your current printer's defaults to double-sided printing.
- Save ink or toner by using the "fast draft" option included in most word processing programs.

■ *Choose less toxic or rechargeable batteries and dispose of spent batteries properly.*

- Buy rechargeable batteries—it's now easier than ever! Some manufacturers are redesigning their products to reduce or eliminate the use of toxins. Read the label before you buy.
- Dispose of spent batteries properly to reduce the potential threat to human health and the environment when improperly disposed of.



■ *Consider using a digital camera.*

- Choose a digital camera and save your photos on a reusable disk to reduce waste. You can also send photos via e-mail to friends and family and delete undesirable pictures without having to pay for prints.





Paper

Paper is perhaps the number one supply used in a typical office, which explains why people are saving time, money, and environmental resources by converting printed items into electronic, paperless documents. Consider the many ways you can reduce, reuse, or recycle paper in your home office:

■ *Purchase recycled paper and environmentally preferable supplies.*

— When buying any office supply, try to find recycled-content and non-toxic options. Buying paper made from a high percentage of post-consumer waste helps reduce the number of trees needed to make paper “from scratch.” It also saves energy and keeps used paper out of the trash.

■ *Reduce the amount of paper you use.*

— Share electronic files with others instead of printing hard copies. Also, be sure to erase and reformat disks rather than purchasing new ones or disposing of old ones.

— Make double-sided copies for internal documents and drafts.

— Use the blank side of single-sided documents for scrap paper or low-priority printouts instead of using a new piece of paper each time.

— Conduct a “paper audit” to determine the kind and volume of paper waste you generate, and then take steps to use less by considering the following “paperless” options:

- **Email** can be used for both internal and external modes of communications, such as letters, memos, and updates.

- **Web Sites and Web Pages** meet a variety of complex publishing needs, serving as an “electronic brochure” that offers detailed information about products and services, or keeps track of family events with photos and video images.

- **CD-ROMs**, which can hold hundreds of pages of text, graphic images, and audio and visual clips, are often less expensive to produce than written documents, and offer more flexibility in the amount of information they contain.

■ *Reuse envelopes and file folders.*

— Choose reusable messenger envelopes to send information.

— Reuse file folders by relabeling them or simply folding them in the reverse direction.

■ *Find alternatives to sending and receiving letter mail.*

— Use email, voice mail, and fax modem transmissions whenever possible.

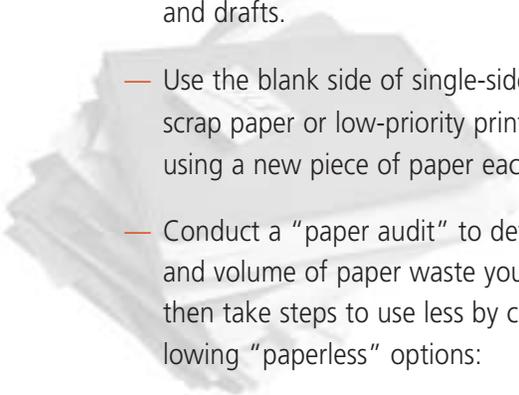
— Pay your bills via e-billing programs so that you reduce the amount of waste you generate.

— Cancel hard-copy subscriptions to newspapers, newsletters, and magazines you don't read or can access online.

— Reduce junk mail. To take your name off mailing lists visit the Direct Marketing Association at www.dmaconsumers.org/consumerassistance.html

■ *Recycle used paper.*

— Recycle white and mixed paper. Home offices can use municipal recycling programs to recycle materials (like paper, cardboard, and newspapers) that businesses generally have to pay to dispose of properly.



Writing Tools

All too often pens, pencils, crayons, and other writing tools eventually end up in the garbage, so be sure to consider some of the following alternatives to extend their use and reduce waste:

■ *Buy refillables.*

— “Mechanical” pencils and ballpoint pens can be refilled hundreds of times, as long as the pen or pencil casing does not break.

■ *Choose recycled products.*

— Several pencil and pen manufacturers now make their products from recycled plastic, newspapers, and fabrics—even old money. Read the label on the package before you buy.

■ *Avoid toxics.*

— An increasing number of pens and markers are available in nontoxic ink. Crayons are now made from soybean oil instead of more dangerous chemicals.

■ *Buy in bulk.*

— Buy pens, pencils, and markers in multi-packs rather than single packages to save on the resources used for packaging.

Furniture

The choices for buying eco-friendly desks, chairs, cabinets, shelves, and other office furniture are plentiful. Here’s where you can start when making a new purchase:

■ *Buy recycled furniture.*

— More and more shelving and countertops are being made from recycled alternatives to conventional wood or fiberboard products.

— Consider furniture made of “wheatboard.” This alternative material is manufactured from straw that is normally discarded when wheat is harvested. Wheatboard is a sturdy fiberboard that is more economical than standard wood particleboard.

— Seek out one of the many manufacturers that incorporate recycled steel or aluminum into their furniture designs.

■ *Refurbish old furniture.*

— Before you buy new furniture, consider the possibility of recovering or refinishing your current stock. Wood can be restained or repainted, and cushions can be recovered.

■ *Donate old furniture.*

— Contact community groups, churches, shelters, schools, and even senior centers before discarding used desks, filing cabinets, and other office furnishings and equipment.



RESOURCES



■ *For more information on ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle every day, visit:*

Care2, an environmental network connecting consumers with nonprofit organizations and eco-oriented corporations www.care2.com

Earth911, providing environmental information and ideas for your local area www.earth911.org

EarthShare, a nationwide network of America's leading nonprofit environmental and conservation organizations www.earthshare.org

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste www.epa.gov/osw

■ *For information on purchasing recycled products, visit:*

Eco Mall provides an array of information about environmentally preferable products, including office supplies www.ecomall.com

GreenDisk www.greendisk.com

Green Earth Office Supply sells a wide range of environmentally friendly office and school supplies www.greenearthofficesupply.com

Recycle Store, which showcases recycled-content products and puts you in touch directly with their manufacturers www.recyclestore.com

Solid Waste Agency of North Cook County's Eco-Friendly Marketplace www.swancc.org/ecofriendlymarketplace

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste: Comprehensive Procurement Guidelines www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/procure

■ *For information on ways to reduce waste when constructing new spaces, visit:*

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste: Construction and Demolition Debris www.epa.gov/epaoswer/non-hw/debris/index.htm

■ *For information on rechargeable batteries or to find a dropoff site near you, visit:*

Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC), a nonprofit public service organization www.rbrc.org