

# Going Green in a Small Business

## How to begin in your office:

### Step 1:

If your goal is to influence your employer and co-workers to be kind to the environment is important to not be afraid to make suggestions when you identify problems. For example, if someone constantly leaves lights on in rooms that are not in use, say something! If you don't want to confront them directly, speak to your boss and ask them for assistance.

### Step 2:

Be aware of devices and activities that waste energy and resources. Replace incandescent bulbs with fluorescent ones and turn them off when they are not needed. Replace old toilets with new low-flow models to conserve water. Turn computers off when they are not in use or at least be sure to configure them to use "Energy Star" features if available. Only heat and cool areas of the building where it is necessary. If your [business](#) has a large roll up door that employees and visitors open and close as they enter and exit an air-conditioned area, consider installing a smaller door beside it so that the larger door can remain closed. Install weather strips or repair the seal on entrances where air freely flows through the cracks. Only water grass and natural areas outside the business as needed and try not to waste water. If several co-workers go to the same restaurant for lunch, be sure to carpool. Post friendly conservation reminders throughout the office to help keep these important issues on everyone's mind. Set conservation goals and offer incentives to employees who meet them. Try to only do business with vendors who do their part to protect the environment. For instance, if your company has a website, use the services of a web host who is environmentally conscious. On your website, mention the things that you do to protect the environment. It helps to influence the visitors who read it and may give them some great ideas that they can adopt at work.

### Step 3:

Learn to recycle. This includes sorting paper, plastic, and glass and sending it to the proper facility for processing, but there are plenty of other ways. In your shipping department, buy recycled cardboard boxes and reuse boxes and packing materials from incoming shipments. Use ozone safe, recycled bio-starch packing peanuts instead of Styrofoam. In your sales, marketing, and accounting departments, reduce your paper usage by sending advertisements, notices, and confirmations to customers electronically. When [computers](#) or office equipment is decommissioned, consider donating it to other local businesses or to schools. If the equipment is to be disposed of, do it properly.

### Step 4:

If your company manufactures parts, use non-hazardous components and recyclable materials. There is a directive called RoHS (Restriction of Hazardous Substances) which was adopted in the European Union in 2003 that addresses these issues. Please visit their website at <http://www.rohs.gov.uk/> for more details.

### Step 5:

Saving the environment is an important job and all businesses should be enthusiastic about contributing. Everyone needs encouragement and a friendly reminder from time-to-time, so if you notice areas that need improvement, be sure to discuss them with your employer. Also, [email](#) a link to this article to your employer and ask them to read it. Most likely, they will appreciate your concern and take action.

## Ways to help in your Small Business:

### Step 1:

Offer to coordinate an office-wide recycling program. The National Recycling Coalition website has a calculator which shows how much energy can be saved by recycling different products and the impact each has on the environment. For example, making paper from recycled paper reduces contributions to air pollution by an astonishing 95 percent.

### Step 2:

Encourage alternatives to paper. Email, message boards, chat programs, various software programs and virtual offices and filing cabinets should really preclude the use of most inner office paperwork.

### Step 3:

Conduct a quick energy audit and look for areas prone to waste, such as electricity. Replace any old, energy-consuming incandescent light bulbs with the new Energy Saving Compact Fluorescent (CFL) bulbs which use 66 percent less energy. Turn off lights and equipment when not in use and allow computers to go to "sleep" mode during the day when not in use. According to the Energy Star program, activating sleep settings on just one [computer](#) can prevent about 300 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

### Step 4:

Suggest telecommuting as a way for employees to save resources at the offices and spend less of their income on gasoline. Working from home also improves air quality, lessens employee absences, and bolsters a company's bottom line. The advent of the computer and programs such as MyPC augments the ability of employees to [work from home](#).

### Step 5:

Make sure water is being used efficiently. Have any sink or toilet leaks repaired immediately. Hot water leaking at a rate of one drip per second can waste up to 1,661 gallons of water over the course of a year.

### Step 6:

Minimize the use of commercial cleaning solutions. Many contain toxic chemicals which can cause Sick Building Syndrome, resulting in the expense of sick time paid out to employees for related ailments. Use homemade mixtures or buy from green supply companies.

### Step 7:

Put your office's money where its mouth is. As often as possible, only work with environmentally-friendly vendors. When you purchase office equipment, look for items that have the EPA's ENERGY STAR label which indicates a product with eco-friendly features. As an example of the impact this can have, the EPA said a [home office](#) outfitted exclusively with ENERGY STAR equipment (computer, monitor, printer, and fax) can save enough electricity to light that home for more than four years.

### Step 8:

Install Fluorescent Lighting. This is an easy fix that I recently made to my own office. Every hotel room I stayed in last year had compact fluorescent lighting. Most homes I visited still didn't. I work out of my home and recently made the change. My electric bill dropped, the heat output from the lamps is less and they'll last longer. Ultimately over the course of its lifetime, a CFL will cost \$14.40 compared to \$50.14 for a comparable incandescent bulb, a savings of 71%.

Step 9:

Turn up or turn back the thermostat during unoccupied times. This is a simple fix that will save tremendously in heating and cooling bills. Once you see the money that you've pocketed, use it to buy a programmable thermostat.

Step 10:

Use [e-mail](#) instead for faxes and paper memos or letters. You generate far less waste and will frequently get a quicker response. Also, emails take less space when filed.

Step 11:



Recycle Running my own [business](#), I burn through a lot of paper. You can half your paper costs if you print on both sides for drafts. It does take a little extra effort to recycle, but even Fox News has multiple bins throughout its facility for plastic, paper and irredeemable trash. You can support the economic viability of recycling if whenever even possible you buy office products made from recycled material.

Step 12:



Use a [laptop](#) computer. Not only will you be able to take it anywhere when you travel but you'll pare your power costs. Laptop computers are built for energy efficiency. A laptop's LCD screen uses 1/3 the energy of a typical Cathode Ray Tube, CRT.

Step 13:

Put all your AC / DC converters on power strips. Switch them off when they are not in use. So called wall warts for cell phones and cordless phones drain power as long as they are plugged into a live outlet whether or not the devices are in use. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the annual energy waste from these devices across the US equals the output of 17 power plants.

Step 14:

Buy Energy Star Rated Appliances. They are available in fax machines, copiers, printers and more. Compare not just initial costs, but lifetime expense when you replace or buy new office equipment. Energy Star Appliances use less energy, save money and have less of an impact on the environment.

Step 15:



Buy a Watt's Up Pro. The manufacturer, Brad Volin, is a [small business](#) success story. In college his roommate blamed him for high electrical bills due to his waterbed. Volin set out to find a way to monitor the electrical consumption of power devices while they were in use. He created his first unit 10 years ago, and now manufacturers them in Colorado. Buying one will give you an easy, direct way to measure the energy costs of any electrical machinery that you have to buy for business. They are available through [www.doublelead.com](http://www.doublelead.com)

Step 16:



Install blinds or shades to keep out summer sun and lower air-conditioning costs. Heating and cooling costs are a big expense for many stores and [small businesses](#). Awnings were universal on most grocery stores just fifty years ago. They practically disappeared in the days of cheap power.

Step 17:

Insulate. If you are in an older building, you could be very surprised at how little insulation your walls actually have. A neighbor of mine did some recent remodeling to learn that the only thing between his inner and outer wall was a layer of tar paper. Install a layer of fiber glass if you remodel. If you ever feel a draft you're leaking heat. Caulk and weather-strip windows and doors. If you can afford to do so, replace windows with double glazed energy saving models. The changes will keep your place cooler in the summer and warmer in winter.

Step 18:



Consider a Bio Mass Stove. If winter fossil fuel bills are killing your bottom line, you might be in an area where it makes economic sense to get a heater that burns bio mass, either wood waste pellets or corn. New models are efficient and [computer](#) controlled with catalytic combustors to scrub soot from exhaust. I've seen them in use and can vouch for how well they work. Owners boast of how little their heating costs now are.

Step 19:

Get an Energy Audit Most utilities will be happy to do an energy audit of your facility at a reasonable cost analyzing all the places you can cut energy use by increasing efficiency. These assessments pay for themselves.

Step 20:



Don't buy an SUV unless you absolutely need one There used to be an obscene [tax](#) deduction granted to owners of SUV's that weighed over 6000 lbs. It used to allow anybody who used a vehicle at least 50% of the time in business to buy the biggest possible car and write it off her taxes in just one year. Not only are those road hogs terrible for the environment, they exacerbate traffic jams and are more roll over prone than cars with lower centers of gravity.

Step 21:



Buy a Hybrid With the recent change in Congress, take a close look at the tax incentives for buying fuel efficient hybrids. A hybrid combines an internal combustion engine and an electric motor powered by batteries. The gas engine is used only when needed, producing far better gas mileage. GM announced today that its Saturn Aura Green Line hybrid will qualify for a \$1,300 tax [credit](#), making it the cheapest hybrid for sale in the US If you have to have an SUV, GM and Ford both make them in hybrids. Yes, gas prices fluctuate, but the average price of gas today is double what it was just five years ago.

#### Step 22:

Put in a skylight if you can. A full sized skylight will admit more light to a room than a vertical window. You can install one over your desk to illuminate where it's needed. Skylights provide full spectrum, natural lighting. On a sunny day, the light output from a ten inch, easy-to-install, tubular sky light is comparable to a 100 watt bulb.

#### Step 23:



Install a Swamp Cooler If you work in a climate with low humidity, consider an evaporative cooler for your workspace instead of air conditioning. In these devices, also known as swamp coolers, a fan draws air into a box where it flows through pads soaked in water. The air sponges up the water causing its temperature to drop between 15 and 40 degrees. It's the same effect that chills summer air next to a waterfall. Evaporative coolers cost about half as much to install as central air conditioning and use about one-quarter as much power with no refrigerant. Evaporative cooling has proven its use to you every day, in your car's radiator.

#### Step 24:

Detect for Radon Gas. Radon is the second biggest cause of lung cancer after cigarette smoking. It's responsible for an estimated 21,000 deaths each year and is present in all fifty states. Since Radon originates in the soil, testing should be done on the lowest level of your [business](#) that is occupied. It would be most hazardous if you work out of your home in a converted basement or in a ground level facility such as a warehouse or garage. Set up a short term test kit which will be exposed for just a few days. Then seal it. Send to the lab referenced on the kit for evaluation. If your workplace is below the safe threshold, you can rest easily.

#### Step 25:

Mitigate for Radon Gas If your test results are over the safe threshold, you'll need to follow up with long term monitoring. Depending on the results, you'll have to take steps for radon mitigation such as sealing cracks and other openings in the foundation of your building. You'll probably need to also install vent pipes and fans.

#### Step 26:

Install Carbon Monoxide Detectors Carbon monoxide exposure can cause headaches, cognitive impairment, neurological disorders and death. They gas can be released by faulty heating systems and can be particularly hazardous in loading docks and working garages. To check on the CO levels in your business, you should install a CO monitor. They look like [smoke detectors](#) and will keep constant watch on the air quality in your workspace.

#### Step 27:



Ban Smoking in Your Workplace Smoking is a major source of CO pollution in the workspace. According to a Gallup poll, 95 percent of Americans believe companies should either ban smoking totally in the workplace or restrict it to separately ventilated areas. Smokers are a drag on your health costs because they die 10-15 years earlier than non smokers. End of life care for them is very expensive. It's probably cost effective to offer your smokers a free how to quit program. As an ex-smoker I do miss the right to light up at work now and then, but I know that my health and [productivity](#) are better, now that I breath green.

#### Step 28:



Use Water Filters on Your Taps instead of bottled water Americans spend more than \$8 Billion a year on bottled water. You can get comparable purity and taste by installing a water filter that will cost pennies a gallon. One of the worse substances found in tap water comes from pipes that are more than twenty years old – lead which can enter your water supply through corrosion of brass fixtures or solder at pipe joints. Lead can cause adults to experience high blood pressure or kidney problems, which can harm your bottom line as health costs climb. Water filters can also eliminate parasites like giardia and cryptosporidium, which was responsible in 1993, for a massive outbreak of water borne diarrhea in Milwaukee. The reverse osmosis filter is the gold standard. They usually mount under a sink and were originally developed to desalinate seawater. To chill the water, store it in gallon containers in the [office](#) refrigerator.

#### Step 29:

Replace Your Office Refrigerator Today's models use 40% less energy than those sold as recently as five years ago. Many utilities have buy backs, credits or free pick ups of older models. Even if you don't buy a new one, you can save energy by defrosting it often and checking to see if your door gasket is tight.

#### Step 30:



Eliminate Polystyrene Coffee Cups In another posting, "How to use Promotional Items to Grow Your Small Business," I suggested getting coffee cups made for your steady customers displaying your name and logo, website and phone number. When clients come to your office, offer them a cup of coffee in those cups, which they get to keep. Have your employees bring their own mugs, or give them the company cups when they've passed probation. Make sure that the cups are washed with green cleaners and you've set the stage for eliminating Styrofoam coffee cups. Perhaps you've heard the joke that if you could choose how to be reincarnated, you might want to come back as a polystyrene foam cup. Why? Because they last forever. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency more than 3 million tons of polystyrene is made in the U S each year. Almost all of it ends up in landfills.

#### Step 34:

Buy Green Coffee I'm not talking about getting unroasted beans, but in buying coffee that was grown in a sustainable manner. Coffee is probably the most widely consumed foodstuff in American [offices](#). It's a perk (pun intended) that workers and office visitors depend upon. No coffee is grown on the US mainland. Most of it is imported after being cultivated on small farms in the tropics. For coffee grown to the highest standards, buy coffee that bears the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal of approval. Packages so marked are from farmers who pledged to control pollution, conserve natural resources and wildlife habitat, while treating their workers responsibly.