

10 Steps toward Going Green



Whether you are a small business or a corporate giant, going green should be one of your top priorities. Here are 10 steps for becoming an eco-sensitive organization – covering everything from what to do with your leftover lunch bag to how to plan for your next building expansion!

1

Appoint a sustainability officer.

Regardless of the size of your company, it is important to identify a single individual who will be responsible for the development, implementation, and oversight of the company's green initiatives. For small businesses, that may be one of many hats the person wears. In larger companies, this role often requires a full-time position. In all cases, the sustainability or "green" officer is charged with reducing the company's carbon footprint and protecting the environment.

2

Conduct a waste assessment.

Before your sustainability officer can put effective programs into place, you have to know where you stand as a company. How much material waste and of what kind are you producing? Where are your energy drains? End-to-end analysis of your business processes can provide quantifiable data as to material waste, and water and energy utilities often offer audit services that can assist you in identifying wastage and in implementing energy-efficient procedures.

3

Set waste reduction goals.

After you have performed a waste assessment, you can put plans and goals in place for waste reduction, energy savings, and recycling. Your goals should be two-fold: First, what immediate changes can you implement that will carry a positive impact? These are typically small and low-cost options: for instance, eliminating disposable cups in the cafeteria, changing to eco-friendly cleaning products, and switching to low-energy lighting. Second, however, long term goals need to be set. These goals are often more far-reaching and may require an investment of funds, time, and effort to implement. Utilizing eco-sensitive building materials and green marketing strategies fall into this category.

For the greatest impact, it is imperative to establish – and enforce – corporate green procedures. These procedures must be mandated for all levels of staff, from the CEO to the newest intern, and for all locations if your company is spread across a geographic distance. Everyone, regardless of position, department, and location, must be involved.

4

Contract with eco-friendly vendors.

Finding and contracting with vendors that support sustainability goals is a critical step to keeping your green goals on track. Larger, multi-location businesses that want to outsource waste and recycling across the board should research and contract with a waste management firm that works to not just remove and dispose of trash, but that helps to set waste reduction goals, and understands and complies with environmental regulations on local and national levels. Smaller firms should be certain to use green vendors in areas from waste hauling to food vendors and office supply companies.

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5

Invest in recycling.

One of the areas where investment truly makes a difference is in purchasing materials and equipment that streamline waste reduction and recycling processes. This includes such items as recycling bins near cafeterias, workstations, and break rooms; cardboard balers; trash compactors; and aluminum can crushers.

Digital data destruction should also be considered as part of your recycling program. This process safely removes all digital data and information from used media such as CDs and hard drives prior to recycling. From there, all by-products can be safely recycled rather than just shredded, making the process a truly green one.

6

Plan for E-Waste

Be sure to include e-waste initiatives in your recycling plan; computers, laptops, DVD players, and other electronic products nearing their end of their useful lives can be reused, refurbished or recycled. Read the U.S. EPA's recently published [WasteWise Update on Electronics Reuse and Recycling](#), to learn more on this topic.

7

Practice composting.

According to the USEPA report "Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste in the United States: 1998 Update," food waste makes up some 10.4% of the solid waste generated nationwide. By practicing composting at business facilities, you can avoid overloading landfills and incinerators and instead create nutrient-rich compost that will benefit (rather than harm) over-used soils.

8

Build with recycled materials.

Is your business growing? Whether you are remodeling, expanding, or building, you should be "thinking green." Discuss with your vendors and contractors how to incorporate recycled materials into your building plans and how to dispose of waste and excess materials in an economical and eco-sensitive fashion.

9

Employ green marketing strategies.

Internet marketing is not only competitive in today's technology-minded marketplace, but it is eco-friendly. Email marketing, social networking, pay-per-click campaigns, and more, all develop leads and sales without generating paper waste. If your business does have a need for paper-based marketing, be sure to employ green strategies and qualify your prospects prior to mailing to them to avoid excess wastage.

10

Monitor and evaluate progress.

As with every other aspect of business, from finances to marketing strategies, nothing should be left to chance or assumption. Green initiatives are no exception. Establish metrics to judge how successful you have been as a company in meeting your goals. Consider the amount of material recycled, water and energy savings, the incorporation of recycled paper and supplies into daily office use, and the impact of partnering with eco-friendly vendors. Make changes as necessary to continually improve your procedures and programs to achieve the greatest impact in keeping our world green.

