
WORKPLACE MATTERS

Want to go green? Make it a team effort

Most companies want to be environmentally responsible and good corporate citizens. The challenge is turning ideas into action.



Robin
Scott

Organizing a dedicated sustainability committee — sometimes known as a “green team” — can help provide the structure and energy to implement sustainability initiatives. It also can motivate employees who want to make a difference in their work environment.

Most green teams address a range of environmental areas, including water and energy conservation, renewable energy, waste prevention, recycling, green purchasing, fleet transportation, and sustainable leadership.

First, select the right team participants. Ideally, the committee should have representatives from a broad range of company functions and levels.

Be sure to include a representative from facilities, maintenance and purchasing, because these employees will likely be directly affected by the initiative. Giving them a chance to help with its design will help to ensure a successful effort.

Once the team is assembled, establish specific and measurable goals for the group. Begin with some easily accomplished tasks such as starting a recycling program or a campaign to reduce energy by turning out lights and office equipment when not in use.

Ask the team to communicate these goals to the rest of employees, as well as track progress. If possible, establish a baseline in each goal area, so you can document results. Examples might include measuring current office paper usage, utility costs, printing costs or the amount of recycling.

Regular communication about the initiative should occur via e-mail, an intranet or presentations at group meetings.

To encourage continued participation, be sure to regularly share progress and appreciation for employee participation. If possible, offer incentives, such as a pizza lunch or reusable water bottles, when milestones are achieved.

Most green teams begin by focusing efforts on improving internal operations. As the team grows over time, it may expand its reach to include vendors and suppliers, local community organizations or government agencies. This external engagement extends the potential benefits of the company’s sustainability efforts to the larger business and civic community.

Here are some projects to get your green team started:

- ◆ Implement a “think before you print” effort. The average office worker goes through 10,000 sheets of paper a year.
- ◆ Make hard copies only when necessary and print on both sides of recycled paper. Reduce paper margins to 0.75 inches, from the default 1.25 inches in most word processing programs.
- ◆ Reduce the use of disposable water bottles. Americans throw out

over 38 billion plastic water bottles every year. Encourage employees to use reusable bottles. Offer pitchers of water at meetings. If water quality is a concern, sign up for a water delivery service or attach a water filter to the office faucet.

◆ Getting to and from work or traveling to business meetings represents the biggest part of some companies’ energy use and pollution generation. Reduce miles driven by encouraging alternate means of commuting to work, telecommuting or four-day workweeks. As an alternative to traveling for meetings, consider “virtual meetings” via teleconference or Web-based meetings.

◆ Dispose of electronics properly. NextStep Recycling can recycle or refurbish a wide variety of electronics products. Find out more at www.nextsteprecycling.org.

◆ Limit the use of disposables at company provided meals and events.

◆ Evaluate packaging, shipping and marketing materials to eliminate waste. Reuse shipping supplies. Use shredded paper for packaging. Order products in bulk when possible.

◆ Find schools or community agencies that can creatively reuse your company’s waste. Scrap wood, wire, paper, electronic goods and other items can often be put to good use in the classroom, in craft projects or in creating new products.

Changing old habits and forming new ones takes time, patience and persistence, but the effort is worth it. A greener workplace can mean a lighter ecological footprint, a healthier and more productive place to work, and good news for the bottom line.

If you have questions about training your work force, contact Robin Scott, business service coordinator at Lane Workforce Partnership, at robino@laneworkforce.org or (541) 682-7224.