
WORKPLACE MATTERS

Unconventional employee benefits gaining popularity

A recent survey found more than half of U.S. businesses offer some form of green benefits.

According to "The Greening of HR Survey," published in 2009 by Buck Consultants of New York, 57 percent of companies surveyed offer tele-work options, 52 percent offer ride-share programs and 12 percent offer socially responsible 401(k) investment options.



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A whopping 77 percent of employers offered some kind of reward system to encourage green behaviors, including special recognition, prizes or monetary incentives.

Many green benefits can be inexpensive or offset by tax incentives, which makes them accessible even during a down economy. Here are some ideas based on green benefits offered by local businesses:

Transportation: One of the most commonly offered green benefits, transportation assistance can include bus passes, incentives to ride or walk to work, or tele-work options.

About 90 local employers provide Lane Transit District bus passes to employees through LTD's Commuter Solutions Program. Marcia Maffei, LTD's employer services coordinator, can help businesses set up a program and apply for a tax credit of 25 to 35 percent. Maffei can be reached at 682-6206 or by e-mail at Marcia.maffei@ltd.org

Solarc Architecture and Engineering offers free bus passes.

"They also encourage us to walk or ride our bikes to work," said Jodi Sommers, marketing director for Solarc. "If we walk or ride our bikes to work for half the month, we receive \$25. If we do it for the full month, we receive \$50."

Green Gear Cycling in Eugene offers covered bike parking, shower facilities, a discount on bike parts and shop privileges for employees, their families and friends.

Work environment: Green buildings can enhance employees' satisfaction and productivity through increased natural light, use of low-toxicity materials, space efficiency and increased contact with the natural environment.

The Royal Caribbean Call Center in Springfield is a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified building. In addition to natural light and design qualities that promote team communication, the building has a high-quality heating, ventilating and air-conditioning system linked into an under-floor ventilation system with local controls so employees can set their own temperature and humidity levels.

Financial: Employers who offer retirement benefits can provide access to socially responsible investments. Small businesses and nonprofit groups often choose "social fund" companies, such as Calvert Funds, said Patricia Hathaway, a certified financial planner with Eugene-based Hathaway Financial Services.

Eugene's 2FormArchitecture is one of the companies that does this. Architect Gabriel Greiner said he "really appreciates 2Form's socially responsible 401(k) and the employer match that's provided."

Work culture: Creating a green work culture can be as simple as encouraging employees to explore green practices. This includes recycling, paperless meetings, a green procurement policy and employee training in sustainable practices.

Kristena Cox, an "ecobroker" with Windermere Real Estate, said, "Part of my job satisfaction comes from being able to pursue a green approach to my work."

Windermere also encourages Cox's involvement in the local Green Lane Sustainable Business Network, she said. More information on the network can be found on the Web at greenlane-sbn.org.

Taking steps to offer green benefits can benefit your bottom line. Companies reap rewards in increased worker engagement, decreased energy costs and a larger market share.

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