

TOP 10 STEPS TO A HEALTHY OFFICE



Reports estimate 69 million workers miss days of work due to illness. In fact, together, they miss 407 million workdays, and that translates to \$48 billion in lost economic output each year. Studies show that one of the major culprits causing all these lost workdays and money is the workplace itself. Unhealthy air and toxic chemicals abound in the typical office, and it's literally making workers sick. A few easy steps can help you create a healthier and greener office.

1 CONSERVE ENERGY

According to the Department of Energy, office buildings account for nearly 30% of commercial energy demand. Yet even a simple change like using your computer's Sleep Mode can dramatically decrease office energy use. Sleep Mode uses very little power because it stores the documents you've been using in memory, and the monitor goes black. Since 40% of the energy it takes to run your computer goes to the monitor, using the sleep mode regularly can add up to a big savings.

2 DEFEAT DUST

Dust is the second leading cause of allergies, followed by pollen. Left to linger, dust gives toxins from cleaning and office supplies and electronics a place to land. That means those toxins stick around longer, polluting your indoor air. On top of that, many offices have a very serious dust mite problem, and there are likely millions in yours. Each dust ball can contain as many as 250,000 mites. To stop being so hospitable to the mites and rid your office of other contaminants, use an air purifier that features a true-medical grade HEPA in combination with a granular carbon filter. The HEPA filter helps trap contaminants like dust and other particles of .3 microns or larger. The carbon absorbs toxic chemicals that may be emanating from office equipment like the printer and fax.

3

CREATE A GREEN SANCTUARY

Many plants like Gerber daises, philodendrons, and peace lilies absorb airborne pollutants, making the air you breathe cleaner. Although plants are not a replacement for an air purifier, they do a great job of filtering out various contaminants that are emitted into the air by office furniture, carpeting, electronics, and office supplies. Because they absorb these contaminants through their leaves, it's important to dust the leaves regularly.

4

WHAT'S OUTSIDE YOUR DRINKING WATER?

Over 1 million plastic bottles go into landfills every day in America. These require 1.5 million barrels of oil to produce, and more than 1 million tons of plastic that emits more greenhouse gas than 500,000 cars. The wrong bottle can expose you to chemicals that pose some serious health risks. Check the number under the bottle inside the triangle. Use only plastic bottles that are numbered #1, #2, #4 and #5. They contain polyethylene or polypropylene, which have the least toxic additives. These plastics are also non-chlorinated, which is good for your health as well as the environment. Avoid bottles that are made from PVC (#3), polystyrene (#6), and polycarbonate (#7), which contain hormone disruptors and other potential health threats.

5

CONSERVE PAPER

Paper makes up 40% of all our garbage and that is more than any other type of waste. The average employee uses 10,000 sheets of paper a year for printed proposals, emails, and other documents. This is bad news when you consider the paper-making process causes deforestation, water pollution, and demolishes habitats of thousands of animals. Buying recycled paper is more important than ever. Look for post-consumer recycled content paper that does not rely on newly cut trees. Also, go digital as much as possible and make sure you only print what is absolutely necessary. You can pay your office bills online, and most people are content to receive and forward electronic documents.

6

AVOID “ELECTROMAGNETIC POLLUTION”

Studies show that the electronics you have in your office can lead to serious health concerns, including increased stress levels. The popularity of wireless office laptops, a wireless keyboard and mouse, and cell phones are making matters worse. As a result, many people are literally becoming ill from the 21st-century office. To protect yourself, use cable modems whenever possible and air tube wireless headsets during cell phone use (see Resources for recommendations).

7

USE ECO-FRIENDLY CLEANERS

The National Research Council estimates that fewer than 30% of the roughly 17,000 petrochemicals available for use have been tested for their effects on human and environmental health. That is why it is important to use healthy, organic cleaning products. Recommend to your facility manager that he or she hire cleaning companies that use healthy cleaners. If this can't be changed, at least make sure you're wiping down your own workspace with eco-friendly, healthier, multi-purpose cleaners.

8

BEWARE OF THE OFFICE BREAK ROOM

Far too often people stand around and watch their food cook in the microwave. By doing this, you unknowingly subject your self to harmful microwaves. Make sure to be at least six feet away from the microwave when it is in use. Also another concern is unfiltered water from the kitchen sink. Tap water is poorly regulated, and most water public utilities test for only 100 chemicals out of potentially thousands that can be present. Convince your office manager to invest in a reverse osmosis or carbon based water filter. This will provide you with better drinking water and a better source for cleaning fruit you bring to the office.

9

DON'T TRASH IT

When throwing out old office electronics, make sure to dispose of it in the proper manner. In many states in the U.S., it is illegal to throw out old electronics, and you may even be fined. Look for community recycling events or local drop off stations that will recycle and reuse salvageable materials. In addition to electronics, make sure you properly dispose of your printer's ink cartridges. They can take up to 450 years to decompose. Recycle your old ones, and next time you buy, go with refilled cartridges, which cost up to 75% less than new ones.

10

SEE THE LIGHT

More than 25% of all office energy use comes from artificial lighting. Reduce office electric bills by using Light-Emitting Diode (LED) bulbs; instead of the more popular compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs.) LEDs are now the cutting-edge of green light bulbs. They are actually brighter and more energy efficient than CFLs.

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