

# Illawarra Small Business Assistance

## HELPFUL HINT – ECO-FRIENDLY PRACTICES FOR SMALL BUSINESS

Some proprietors question whether small business can make a difference by developing sustainable, eco-friendly practices. Others are becoming proactive and taking steps to raise standards within their enterprises. They recognize the importance of becoming more environmentally aware and the influence ecological reputations can have on shaping their business relationships and market positioning.

For businesses that are sincere, this isn't just a superficial or short-term exercise. It also goes beyond internal practices and should extend outwardly to our relationships with suppliers and customers.

We all need to critically rethink the nature of our business operations and practices within the broader context of our local environment. How well do you rate your actions and overall situation? Are your beliefs and principles for a sustainable eco-friendly environment compatible with and matched by the choices you make within your business?

What can be done to move forward positively and make a difference?

Internal policies need to be revamped and upgraded with a distinct change in the culture of the organization. Proprietors and managers need to lead by example. Employees need to be stimulated and encouraged to be proud of eco-friendly work practices, and to respect their local environments.

In undertaking an audit of your procedures and policies it's necessary to review all sources of consumption and question who supplies it, why it's necessary, what waste is involved, where does it go, how can the needs be satisfied in a more sustainable manner and with minimal impacts on the environment?

***Here are some thought provoking questions and ideas to consider:***

**1) Contamination.** Stop or reduce to minimal levels, any practices that involve the use of plastic bags and plastic wrappers. Review for immediate change to environmentally friendly designed alternatives.

**2) Energy use.** Critically review your monthly energy accounts. Investigate areas that you may be able to cut back on. Are you using energy efficient light bulbs? Are lights being left on in areas which aren't being used? Can you install timers which turn lights off automatically? How many electrical appliances are being left turned on at the power-point? Even small appliances such as mobile telephone chargers and battery chargers continue to draw power and generate heat when not in use. Are you able to independently adjust air-conditioning thermostat temperatures? Can you open a window or put on a jacket rather than turning on the air-conditioner?

What is the situation with your ceiling insulation – can bats be installed? Ask your electricity/gas service provider about energy audits and to check whether they have a 'Greenpower' option; most do. This will enable you to purchase electricity generated by renewable or low-carbon sources. Do you use energy-hungry processing or manufacturing equipment? If so, next time you need to lease or purchase new equipment check to see if more energy-efficient machines are now available. Equipment manufacturers are constantly trying to reduce energy consumption.

**3) Water Use.** Is it feasible to your circumstances to install a rainwater tank? Do toilet cisterns have dual flush capacity? Are there any leaking taps or cisterns? If you wash external windows and/or motor vehicles do you use efficient water wise approved products? Do you own your own building? Next time the hot water service needs replacing, consider installing a solar hot water system. Government subsidies may be available to help reduce the cost

**4) Waste Products.** Analyze your office habits. Do you know what's being thrown out? Do an audit now and set up an action plan to reverse the trend. Keep wasted print paper for writing on or to print on the reverse for non-confidential internal files. Empty boxes can be undone and used for packaging or storage of files. Organic waste can be composted. As there is a wide range of materials that can be recycled it's important to investigate local office recycle programs as well as any other projects for dealing with specific kinds of waste materials.

**5) Reduce Use of Paper.** Review your monthly paper usage and set goals to improve efficiencies and costs. Convert letters and fax messages to email communications. What percentage of emails are printed out? Determine what is essential (print on the reverse of used paper?) and what is not and set up an action plan which will eliminate the need for paper within x months. Scan historic files and data and record on memory sticks with storage in secure offsite locations.

**6) Review Office Stationery and Materials.** Look critically at your needs with a view to reducing monthly office purchases. Investigate opportunities to order refills rather than replacements for things such as ink cartridges for photocopiers and printers. There are likely to be many more options than you realize.

7) **Work that might be done at Home.** Would it be feasible for any of your staff to work from home? If not all, what about some days of the week? In the current age of advanced high speed computerized technology many tasks can be completed from home with the appropriate systems and set-up. The benefits can be quite substantial including reduced motor vehicle travel as well as lower office overheads ranging from energy use and utilities to office supplies. Improved quality of work/life balance and efficient use of time can be strong morale builders for staff and business culture.

8) **Reduced Travel and Use of Fuel.** How could you refine your business visits without losing goodwill or customer transactions? Would it be possible to reduce travel time and participate in fewer in-person events and develop relationships and alliances in more efficient ways? Could you combine client visit programs or place more emphasis on the scheduling of visits until a substantive volume is apparent for a particular area or region? In other words, can you arrange your client visits with significantly less travel but with the same or better outcomes? Do you use E10 (Ethanol) unleaded petrol in your vehicles? Do you encourage staff to carpool, take public transport, and walk or ride to work where possible? When it is time for vehicle changeover can you opt for smaller more efficient models and/or hybrids?

9) **Cleaning Products.** Do you know whether the washing-up liquid and cleaning products used within your office are environmentally friendly? Do they get a green tick of approval? If not change your purchasing habits for the better.

10) **Unused Technology.** How many unused printer cartridges are kept in old boxes in your storeroom and are there old unused mobile phones lying idle? Are there other items of technology no longer in use that can be recycled or disposed of carefully through appropriate agencies?

11) **Shared Office Space.** Could you share space with another business to reduce costs? If you use an office for only part of a week, could you consider renting space in another complex or larger office? If yours is a home-based business and you're considering moving to commercial premises think about strategies to combine with other HBB that might be contemplating similar strategies.

**Finally, make sure you walk the talk!** Whatever you suggest to your staff and other people, remind yourself that you set the standard. Interact with your staff and suggest monthly competitions for different departments to develop more eco-friendly office practices and staff behavior. Encouraging self-directed accomplishments and creativity can be a powerful contributor to the cause of sustainable and eco-friendly business practices.

*If you'd like to suggest additions to this list we would be most interested to hear from you.*

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