

# HOW TO REDUCE YOUR COMPANY'S CARBON FOOTPRINT: TAKING STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

By Marietjie Swanepoel

Concerns about global warming and environmental health risks have given rise to a new era of sustainability. Everyone has the responsibility to move towards more socially and ecologically responsible business practices that will prevent more ecological repercussions such as global warming. Consumers across the globe are becoming increasingly environmentally conscious and companies are engaging in corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices to meet the sustainability expectations of consumers.

'Going green' is the broad term that refers to making conscious choices to reduce your carbon footprint. You may recognise slogans such as the 3 Rs of green living – 'reduce, reuse, recycle'. Also, movements such as Meatless Mondays, and more people making conscious 'green' decisions such as buying from your local grocer, refilling bottles, saying no to single use plastics, carpooling with friends and colleagues, and shopping at thrift stores.

'Going green' terminology is the lingo of the carbon footprint reduction world. One can easily be overwhelmed with all the new buzz words out there and it is imperative to be educated on the 'green' lexicon to help make sense of everything. Understanding terminology such as carbon footprint, carbon dioxide, greenhouse gases, biodegradability, sustainability and eco-friendly can help us to align ourselves with green-living principles.

'Going green' is a step-by-step process. Why not start by participating in your company's greenapsis? 'Greenapsis' is the process a company undergoes to become a green-living company. Every employee can take part in the process of adapting to a green lifestyle with only a few new life choices and so reduce the negative effects of our carbon footprint.



## Less paper

The goal is to use as little paper as possible. Colleagues can be motivated to print less and to recycle. When it is necessary to print, use recycled paper and reuse the back of documents to take notes. Making use of online clouds, encouraging the use of emails and online invoices are steps that encourage a paperless work environment. Sending e-cards to employees is an easy way of using less paper and stepping up your 'going green' commitment.

## Create a green-living kitchen

Creating a space with proper silverware and crockery enables employees to move away from single use plastic and non-recyclable materials. The dishes can be taken care of by an energy-efficient dishwasher using environmentally friendly detergents.

A green-living kitchen encourages employees to bring their own lunches from home and reduces the use of fast-food containers that will end up in a landfill. Reduce the amount of waste generated by encouraging waste minimisation and also recycling practices.

Refrigerators run 24/7, making them prime suspects for excess energy consumption. Clean the coils to help the fridge run more efficiently and make sure your fridge and freezer are not set too cold. Regularly defrost manual-defrost freezers and refrigerators and make sure your refrigerator doors are airtight.

## Be water wise

There is a global outcry to conserve water sources and check our water usage. As a business, you can take part in water conservation while at the same time lowering your water bill. Improve the efficiency of your plumbing system by switching to low-flow outlets for your toilets, showerheads, and faucets. Check for water leaks and fix broken faucets and toilets as soon as possible.

Say goodbye to grass and plant native plants that use up to 80 percent less water than turf grass. Consider smart watering by installing irrigation control systems that water landscapes in the mornings when temperatures are cooler. Look into rainwater storage options for your building and recycled (grey) water for your bathrooms. Education is key, and why not be creative with displays and posters on saving water?

## Remember to switch it off

A device that is always switched on, but is not used contribute to carbon dioxide pollution. Avoid energy vampires, for example electrical appliances that continue to use energy when they are supposedly off like printers on standby. Make a sustainable difference by unplugging devices when they are not used. If this sounds like a lot of trouble, use a power strip that can be turned off at night.

## Maximise natural light

Relying on natural light saves energy while also benefitting employees. The World Green Building Council reported that employees who are working near sunlit areas have a 15 percent higher production rate. This is the result of natural light helping the body's natural rhythms. Using plants in the workplace can also have a positive effect as it creates a calmer and more creative atmosphere.

## Green energy

Electricity is a necessity in most offices. A switch to clean energy providers can be done in phases to manage cost effectivity. Change lightbulbs to LED or CFL bulbs that work on sensors. Look at your environment and see whether solar, wind, or geothermal sources will be a workable solution for your space. When upgrading devices, search for more energy efficient options and recycle old equipment responsibly.

# HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?

## Create your greenapsis team

The first step is to create a 'green team' who can take responsibility and guide the process. Your company's Green Team can investigate the many benefits that a 'going green' policy may have.

## Create green-living challenges

Monthly challenges between employees can be a fun way of learning about sustainable living and 'going green' while actively making a difference in the workplace. Using the stairs, not using the aircons, not using plastic utensils, packing your lunch in reusable containers, and encouraging every employee to bring their own mug and (glass) water bottle are just a few ideas to create green-living challenges. Start your own recycling programme and have 'clean it up' challenges in surrounding areas.



## EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM A GREEN WORKPLACE

### Boost employees' wellness and productivity

Recent studies have shown that a greener workplace improves employees' productivity. Environmentally friendly workplaces enhance the feeling of wellbeing as the employees know their work does not impact the environment negatively. Studies also show that a greener work environment increases job satisfaction and reduces the average sick days per employee. Use indoor plants to improve air quality and pump up the oxygen levels. Plants absorb airborne pollutants and emit healthy negative ions and oxygen into the air. Greener workspaces often have outdoor areas where breaks can be taken. Some companies even host meetings outside of the office. These open spaces make it easier for employees to interact with one another where every employee can literally take a breath of fresh air.

### Your moral commitment – attracting the younger generation

Research shows that the younger generations have a strong moral commitment and are looking for companies that reflect these moral commitments. Younger generations know that a positive social responsibility will impact the company's reputation and in the long run the company's profit margin.

Research suggests that up to 91 percent of Millennials will switch to another company based on its commitment to social good and are interested in companies that invest in sustainability. If your company wishes to attract hard-working youth, it is necessary to look at your carbon footprint as these youngsters want a 'green' career with green-living workers and a CEO who is committed to sustainability.

**Switching to green living usually happens in different stages and may look different for each company. The most important step is taking the first (green) step!**