

Towards a greener and more sustainable business space

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Societal expectation to act with greater environmental consciousness is increasing. Environmental matters are subject to rapid regulatory and legal developments and change, often becoming progressively stricter.



While industry and large corporates are often directly impacted because their large-scale activities are regulated by regulatory approvals such as permits and licences, responsibility for change does not lie with the industrial or manufacturing sector alone, but with all businesses and even consumers. This is key to the creation and maintenance of an environmentally sustainable future for all.

But how can the small to medium – or even larger corporates play their part - especially when bottom-line costs need to be factored in for survival in the current economic climate? Environmental author Justine Sweet, who consults on content for LexisNexis South Africa's Lexis Library, Lexis GRC and Lexis Assure solutions, offers legal and business practitioners the following practical recommendations which may help reduce environmental impacts on a day to day basis:

Create a green culture

Incentivise the reduction of wasteful expenditure, engage staff in recycling programmes and allow staff to benefit from cost savings by providing targets and updates. Create awareness of and partake in campaigns such as Earth Hour, Plastic Free July and Arbor Day to get staff buy-in. "Companies need to recognise that the use of energy, water and paper consumption, generation of waste, manufacturing and packaging all have an impact on the environment," Sweet says. "Embedding resource sensitive compliance within the culture of your organisation, from the top down, will have a positive outcome – both environmentally and financially."

Zero waste journey

Move towards a paperless office environment. Use online products that allow for electronic signatures, online libraries and resources and the cloud for storage as opposed to hard copy storage avoiding the necessity of printing reams of documents. "Accessing an online legal library will reduce your need for large office space drastically. These tools are also kept up-to-date and relevant and do not require hands-on research – professionals can access these from home, their car or from court," says Sweet.

Encourage the use of electronic devices such as tablets to replace traditional paper notepads. Purchase these wisely (consider memory, device speed etc.) to reduce the need to replace them too often. Send all memos and invoices electronically. Buy recycled paper and use pen refills to reduce the amount of plastic waste.

Explore options such as refillable ink cartridges for printers and photocopy machines, eliminate plastic water bottles, disposable cups, spoons and straws or single-use catering items. Buy reusable crockery, cutlery and glasses. Recycle and reuse whatever you can and provide recycling bins on site for staff to use for any items brought in from outside.

Moving towards zero primary inputs

Offices in city centres typically require additional lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning systems for heating or cooling, whereas premises that are situated “off the beaten track” can provide a better outlook, more natural light and options for open windows as ventilation. Consider implementing solar panels and LED lighting to reduce electricity consumption for water heating and lighting. Keep computers, printers and other electronic devices off and unplugged until they are required and run them on energy efficient settings. Encourage staff to only use lighting when necessary.

Older buildings, or a new build, can be made “green” using sustainable and green building practices and materials. By choosing premises away from the city centre and out of high cost metropolitan areas, you may be able to reduce staff travel distances and costs thereby having an added environmental impact.

Reduce office footprint and travel

Provide staff with remote and flexi-work options to reduce the size of your office space, thereby reducing rental costs as well as the need for air-conditioning a larger space, providing refreshments and ablution facilities for a larger staff contingent. Allowing a casual and comfortable dress code where possible will prevent the need for added heating or cooling facilities.

Conduct E-meetings via online video conferencing or calls. Reduce the cost and carbon impact of client service travel, limiting travel to court appearances and essential negotiations. Use online tools that allow for safe and secure signing of documentation, to prevent the need for printing of hard copies and additional physical meetings.

Clean green

Use environmentally friendly or low-impact cleaning products and buy these in bulk to reduce packaging. Fill your office space with lush green indoor plants that clean the air and provide a calming, natural environment.

Connect with green partners

Choose business to business partners that value the environment and make sustainability a core function in their service and product delivery chain. Buy fair trade or organic items such as tea, coffee or milk. Use local suppliers where possible to further reduce the carbon footprint of your supplies.

All businesses and consumers will be impacted by the additional carbon tax included in the fuel tax and this expense will have spin-offs on the cost of all goods and services that require transportation at some stage in the production or delivery chain. By identifying even small areas where businesses can make changes, the domino effect will have an impact on the environment.

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