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Save The Planet With Green Technology

by Wendy Gauntt

Did you know that Earth Day is April 22nd? Consider celebrating by making your office a little more Earth-friendly. Many offices recycle paper and aluminum cans, but with minimal effort, your technology choices can benefit the planet, too. An added incentive: Saving the planet may save your business a little money.

The "3 Rs" of environmentalists are *Reduce*, *Reuse* and *Recycle*. With a little thought and planning, you can apply at least one of these concepts to just about anything you use at the office. Listed below are some technology ideas to get you started. But most important is deciding what is practical for you and your office...any one of these ideas will make a difference, if you do it regularly.

Reduce: Energy Use

Technology advances continually increase energy efficiency. How can you find products that will keep your utility bills low? Look for the Energy Star label. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched the Energy Star program in 1992 to reduce greenhouse emissions by promoting energy-efficient products. The first Energy Star labels were applied to computers and monitors. The EPA has since expanded the program to include other office machines and electronics, home appliances, heating and cooling equipment, and lighting products. Energy Star products use significantly less energy than comparable products, and the savings really add up.

While you're thinking about energy savings, check out the power-saving options on your computer and other office machines. With most computers, you have the option of standby and hibernation modes. These modes are a necessity for laptop computers, where battery power is limited, but they are equally effective at reducing energy use on desktop computers. Standby mode keeps your computer running on just enough power to keep your data in

memory; hibernation mode saves all data and then turns off your computer. When you turn it back on, it returns to where you left off instead of restarting. You can check your computer's settings under Power Management in the Windows Control Panel. One warning: Don't do this with your network server. If the server is hibernating, your network will be down.

Thinking about purchasing sleek new LCD computer monitors for your office? In addition to saving desktop space, they cut energy consumption significantly, using as little as half the energy of a bulky CRT monitor.

Reduce: Printing

Another benefit of a high-quality computer monitor: fewer printouts. Printed paper is still easier on the eyes than a computer monitor, but display technology is advancing all the time. While the paperless office continues to be a futuristic fantasy, even a small reduction in your paper output saves not only paper, but also ink, energy, and wear and tear on the office equipment.

Reuse: Print Supplies

Printers, faxes and copiers provide easy opportunities to go green. You can return used toner and inkjet cartridges to many office supply stores in postage-paid envelopes or to your supplier, where they will be refilled, remanufactured or recycled. Then you can purchase these remanufactured cartridges or even refill them yourself. A new cartridge can often be refilled several times before its parts wear out; remanufactured cartridges have been completely rebuilt to work just as well as new cartridges. Find a reputable remanufacturer, and you can save significant money with little to no difference in quality.

Reuse: Office Equipment

Old computers and other office machines can be donated to charities and schools that lack funds for new equipment; many charities have

special programs for cell phone and pager donations. This is a great way to put your old equipment to good use, with the added financial benefit of a tax deduction. Many computer manufacturers, such as Dell and Gateway, will help you locate charities that will accept your old equipment.

To keep your company's data confidential, remove licensed software and erase files on your hard drive using "document shredder" software, included in many virus protection and utility packages. Using the regular delete process (emptying your trash) actually leaves your files on disk, so anyone with a few software tools can easily recover your data. Shredder software works much like a real paper shredder, ensuring that deleted files are completely destroyed and unrecoverable.

Recycle: Electronics and Batteries

If you can't reduce or reuse, consider recycling. Many common office items contain toxic materials that can poison our landfills. Computers and other machines—any products that contain electronic circuitry—contain heavy metals such as lead, cadmium and mercury. Specialized recycling centers can reclaim nearly all parts of a computer, including plastics, glass, and metal. They will safely dispose of any materials that cannot be reclaimed. Your computer manufacturer may be able to help you locate a nearby facility, and they often give you an incentive discount on your next purchase.

Rechargeable batteries, like those in your cell phone or laptop, also contain toxic metals. The EPA's "Battery Act" of 1996 has made it easy to recycle batteries with drop-off locations at many major retailers.

Research: Technology As A Resource

For more ideas, visit the Internet. It's an incredible source of information on energy savings, recycling programs, environmental

issues, and more. Find the nearest paper recycling bins at www.paperretriever.com, or the nearest battery-recycling center at www.rbrc.com. Find energy management suggestions for your business at

www.energystar.gov. Or search www.google.com for information on any other topic you wish to research.

Reduce, reuse, and recycle whenever you can. Remember: being green is good for you,

your business, and the environment. Happy Earth Day!

Wendy Gauntt, president of CIO Services, LLC (wendy@cioservicesllc.com), is a technology expert and a devoted recycler.