



Reducing Paper Waste at Work

Cutting back on the amount of paper we use in the office is a great way to start making a positive impact on the environment. And replacing virgin paper with recycled is also a big step in the right direction.

You'll be surprised how easy it can be with a bit of effort and coordination in your office. Setting targets for your use of paper and recycled paper will give you something to work towards and a reason to celebrate when you get there!

How much paper waste are we making?

The world has a huge appetite for paper, even in these days of the so-called 'paperless' office. Australians use more than 3.5 million tonnes of paper each year. Only 11% of Australia's office paper is currently being recycled, with nearly 9 out of 10 sheets of office paper are being thrown away.

Much of it was virgin paper with no recycled content and much ended up buried in landfill.

What's wrong with all this waste?

All this paper going to the tip is a 'waste' in the truest sense of the word!

In the past we have often thought of waste materials, like used office paper, as worthless, fit only to be thrown away. But used office paper isn't worthless — it can be recycled, reused, even remade into other products we can use.

Burying paper waste means we miss out on these other uses ... and use up new resources instead.

What can we do?

Try the tips below to begin to reduce the amount and type of paper waste you generate.

Save paper

We all use too much paper and it's quite easy to use less. Find out how paper is being used and disposed of within your office. Key areas include general office use, stationery, forms, correspondence, records and publications.

- Print and photocopy on both sides of the paper.
- Make sure your office machines are able to print or copy on both sides.
- Use e-mail whenever you can and only print out if absolutely necessary.
- Review drafts and include comments on screen, and return them electronically.
- Print drafts at a smaller scale (more than one page per side).
- Use overhead projectors and white boards in meetings instead of paper handouts.
- Order supplies by e-mail.
- Use internet publishing and electronic forms to reduce paper copies.
- Order all supplies in bulk to minimise packaging waste.
- Ensure paper stocks aren't stored in damp or humid conditions as this can cause jamming in machines and paper wastage.
- Set targets for reducing the paper your office uses and try to achieve them.

Using both sides of the paper will halve your paper bill. You should check that your office machines are able to do this.

By taking care when loading them, many office machines such as faxes and printers can easily use paper already printed on one side for drafts and internal use.

Packaging can be a major source of paper waste, especially boxes. Ask your supplier to take their boxes back, or see if they, or you can reuse them.

Ask your supplier about what recycled paper or stationery they stock. If they don't have it, ask them to get some in, or change suppliers.

Recycled paper can be substituted for virgin paper in most cases. Checking how papers being used in your office should quickly identify where recycled paper can fit in. Most office paper is used internally for files so it doesn't need to be of the highest quality.

Again, check that your equipment is able to use recycled paper.

Talk to equipment manufacturers and suppliers about using recycled paper in their machines.

- Ask your paper supplier what recycled stock they have.
- Decide where you can use recycled paper in your operations.
- Check which office machines can take recycled paper.
- Test a number of recycled papers on your equipment to decide which performs best.
- Spread the word about recycled paper by identifying materials printed on it.
- Order paper supplies in bulk to minimise packaging waste.

Reuse/recycle paper

Paper often makes up a large proportion of office waste. Instead of sending used paper to landfill, why not reuse or recycle it in some way?

An audit of office waste will soon identify where good paper is being thrown out unnecessarily and how better management of office waste can retrieve it for reuse or recycling.

Good quality white office paper is extremely valuable and should be recovered where possible. Used white office paper can be turned into office paper with a recycled content, though some virgin pulp may need to be added to strengthen it. Mixed paper and cardboard is turned into cardboard and other products such as tissue paper. Arrange for a company which collects paper for recycling to call regularly. You'll find them listed in the 'Yellow Pages'.

Recyclable paper can be ruined by mixing it with other material such as food scraps. This means the paper can't be recycled and it has to be sent to landfill. Separating bins for paper and other waste and educating staff about their use can reduce contamination and needless waste of paper.

It's also important to let cleaners know what waste separation and recycling systems you are operating.

If we all make an effort to cut paper waste, we'll be acting to care about our environment both now and in the future. And we'll be using resources more wisely and probably

- Audit how your office uses and disposes of its paper.
- Set up paper banks for reusing paper printed on one side only.
- Reuse paper printed on one side for staff note pads.
- Reuse envelopes for internal mail.
- Divert recyclable paper from the general waste stream.
- Find out where you can send good quality office paper for recycling.
- Don't ruin paper for recycling by mixing it with other materials — keep it separate.
- Ensure everyone understands their role in an active recycling program.

For more ideas on how you can help your environment, visit the 'It's a living thing' website at www.livingthing.net.au