

insights

FOR A BETTER BUYING EXPERIENCE

ISSUE 6 • COMPLIMENTS OF YOUR LOCAL OFFICE FURNITURE USA DEALER



Insider's Guide to Buying Green Office Furniture

IN THIS ISSUE:

Learn about the real-world benefits of a green office — and get the information you need to make the smartest eco-friendly decisions.

Real-World Benefits of Green Office Furniture

You have heard the discussions about going green when it comes to buying office furniture. It sounds like a good idea, but you wonder if the real-world benefits are worth all the hype.

The simple answer? Yes. Here are just a few facts to consider:



1) **Better indoor air quality can lead to healthier, more productive employees.**

Furnishing your office with options that have low-VOC coatings and low (or no) levels of other harmful chemicals can immediately improve the quality of the air that you and your staff breathe 40+ hours a week. (VOCs, short for volatile organic compounds, are gases that are emitted from paints and other finishes, glues, carpets, building materials, plastics and many other products.)

In fact, studies have shown that improved indoor air quality can boost an employee's ability to perform mental tasks requiring concentration, calculation and memory.

So, less chemical exposure and cleaner air mean more productivity from healthier employees—and potentially even fewer missed work days from illness.

OVERALL EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE, SPEED AND ACCURACY INCREASES ANYWHERE FROM 4% TO 16% WHEN INDOOR POLLUTANT SOURCES ARE REMOVED.

Source: US. Environmental Protection Agency

2) **Going green can boost staff morale.**

Several for-profit and nonprofit workplace surveys have found that, when asked, most employees say they care about protecting the environment. Likewise, working for an employer who makes green, eco-friendly choices can make employees feel even more positive about their work.

Plus, when you choose eco-friendly furniture alternatives that stand to improve office air quality, you are telling your employees, "We care about you."

3) **Your customers want you to care about the environment.**

More than 60 percent of U.S. adults are either equally as likely or more likely to visit a business that focuses on being green—regardless of distance or effort required, according to a 2010 Harris Interactive study.

In short, customers like to do business with companies like yours who seek out earth-friendly, sustainable solutions. And a larger, more loyal customer base equals higher profits.

IF GIVEN THE OPTION, 63% OF U.S. ADULTS WOULD CHOOSE TO DO BUSINESS WITH AN ECO-FRIENDLY COMPANY OVER ONE THAT IS NOT.

Source: 2010 Harris Interactive Study

4) **Green office furniture can make a difference at the landfill right now.**

When you purchase furniture made from recycled materials, such as recycled steel, you're making an impact on the amount of those materials that end up as trash today.

Plus, making smart green choices, like, for instance, opting for biodegradable furniture, can have a strong future impact. After all, experts estimate that 1.5 million desks and 8.25 million office chairs are thrown away every year in the U.S.

What You Need to Know Before Buying Green Office Furniture

It seems like it would be rather simple: Decide what you can afford, pick out furniture labeled “green” and place your order. But the fact is, there are important, and sometimes a bit complex, considerations that should go into choosing green workspace solutions.

Fortunately, if you arm yourself with the key information listed below, the process can be as easy on your stress level and budget as it is on the environment.

1. Beware of misleading green claims.

As in most industries, the language that some office furniture manufacturers use in their product marketing can be misleading. Even though a piece of furniture may be labeled “green,” and meet the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)’s guidelines for product green advertising, it may not offer the level of eco-friendly materials you have in mind.

For instance, green office furniture is typically made of some form of renewable or recyclable materials. However, the percentage of those materials used in a piece of furniture that is labeled “green” can vary widely, from less than 2 percent (not very green at all) to 100 percent (screams green).

In addition, some green-labeled office furniture may offer non-toxic, water- or bio-based finishes and adhesives, while other pieces labeled “green” may not.

2. You’ll need to set your own standards for what going green means. What does eco-friendly office furniture really mean, then? Well, the EPA’s Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program defines environmentally preferable as “products or services that have a lesser or reduced effect on human health and the environment when compared with competing products or services that serve the same purpose. This comparison may consider raw materials acquisition, product manufacturing, packaging, distribution, reuse, operation, maintenance or disposal of the product or service.”

That’s a start. But in reality, because no universal definition exists, you will have to think about what is important for your company. Is it reducing your business carbon footprint? Is it decreasing your impact on landfill space? Is it improved indoor air quality? Perhaps it’s all of the above.



3. An FSC certification guarantees a product is made of eco-friendly wood. While there are no collective regulations or certifications that evaluate all of the factors you may be looking for in eco-friendly office furniture, there are a few certifications that address specific issues and can help you in your decision-making process.



One important example is the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) seal. The FSC is a nonprofit organization that assesses office furniture (and other products). The FSC seal on a product ensures that the wood and/or paper materials used in its manufacturing have been responsibly harvested for environmental sustainability.

To achieve the FSC seal, a product must abide by 10 guiding principles and 55+ criteria developed by the council. The requirements address legal issues, indigenous and labor rights, and environmental impacts.

The FSC also sponsors an annual Design & Build with FSC awards competition that recognizes excellence in the use of FSC materials. Winners are often a great resource for ideas in commercial sustainability.

4. Products that are GREENGUARD-certified help ensure healthy indoor air. The GREENGUARD Environmental Institute is another nonprofit organization that offers some assurance that a product meets stringent requirements—this time, for indoor air quality.



The GREENGUARD certification symbol means that a piece of office furniture has undergone emissions testing, including measurement of toxicity and chemicals/particles in the air within seven to 14 days after a product is installed in an office. Measured emission levels are then converted by calculation to air concentrations that represent what a person will actually breathe in a single-occupancy room.

5. Going green doesn’t have to put your budget in the red. The pricing of green office furniture runs the gamut from very high-end to quite affordable.

Fortunately, as green options have become more and more mainstream—and manufacturers have more materials readily available to them—the costs of eco-friendly choices have decreased, as well.

For instance, the growing demand for ultra-renewable bamboo hardwood has helped the price for this material drop considerably in recent years. Of course, the reality is that a furniture manufacturer can still purchase a sheet of maple wood for less than bamboo.

Remember, though, that the return on investment for going green, in both potential employee productivity and customer loyalty, can balance out any extra expenses incurred. In addition, tax incentives are often available at the federal, state and local level for businesses that choose to go green.

6. The counsel of a knowledgeable advisor can save you time and money. An Office Furniture USA workspace solution expert who also knows the ins and outs of green furniture can be invaluable. After all, you probably have better things to do with your time than study up on the pros and cons of bamboo and recycled plywood. Yet you don’t want to make any costly mistakes, either.

One of our experts can help you pinpoint the most affordable eco-friendly choices that can still meet your objectives of functionality, flexibility, longevity, comfort and positive customer impressions.

Plus, our local workspace solution experts can even, in many cases, provide you with a hands-on look at furniture options that are already installed and in use.

Six More Affordable Ways to Go Green

Purchasing green office furniture is just one way you can take your office's green initiatives to the next level. Here are six more ideas (that you may not have thought of before):

1. **Think local.** Talk with your Office Furniture USA dealer about how you can reduce the carbon (fuel consumption) footprint of your furniture purchases. You may be able to choose manufacturers and warehouses that are only 50 to 100 miles away, versus 1,000.
2. **Recycle more than just paper and aluminum cans.** Ask employees to also recycle plastic water bottles and yogurt containers, and cardboard and other paper-based packaging (like those paper boxes that many microwaveable lunches come in). Put "bubble wrap" and other plastic packaging on the list, too. Provide labeled bins for easy access.
3. **Pay attention to your HVAC system.** Ensure that air supply and return vents are not blocked by office furniture or equipment to reduce the impact on indoor air quality. Plus, make sure that computers, copiers and other equipment are not too close to temperature sensors. Otherwise, you could be using unnecessary energy to cool workspaces.
4. **Enforce the equipment standby modes.** You've probably heard that setting all computers, copiers, scanners, printers and fax machines to standby mode when not in use is a smart thing to do. But surveys show that a majority of companies don't enforce the policy.
5. **Replace your light bulbs with energy-efficient options.** Start by replacing your conventional T12 fluorescents with T8 or T5 linear fluorescents. These newer fluorescents use 40 to 65 percent less energy and produce 10 percent more light. In addition, T8 and T5 bulbs are made with fewer toxic chemicals.
6. **Get serious about copier policies.** Have an official mandate that all copies be double-sided. And choose paper for your office that is 30 to 100 percent post-consumer recycled and chlorine-free. Or better yet, go paperless.

INDOOR LEVELS OF
AIR POLLUTANTS
CAN BE UP TO FIVE
TIMES HIGHER THAN
OUTDOOR LEVELS.

Source: U.S. Environmental
Protection Agency

Give Going Green ... the Green Light!

Our furniture experts are ready to help you enjoy all the benefits of going green without any of the hassle. Call or visit our showroom to speak with us today.

SOURCES:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
The Daily Green
TreeHugger.com
Entrepreneur.com and Environmental Defense Fund
Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory
BusinessWeek.com

FTC Green Labeling Guidelines
www.ftc.gov/opa/reporter/greengds.shtml
Guidelines for EPA-Recommended Purchasing www.epa.gov/epp
Forest Stewardship Council www.fscus.org
GREENGUARD Environmental Institute www.greenguard.org
DSIRE, Comprehensive List of Environment-Related Incentives www.dsireusa.org

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