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Green and Ethical Purchasing – 10 First Steps

Here are some actions organisations can take to tackle their environmental impact and make a bigger contribution towards ethical purchasing practices.

1 Switch over:

Change your electricity supplier to a greener or ethical source (see 'buying energy', <http://eaclink.info/?YUMNN>). Electrical equipment left on unnecessarily (and overnight) wastes money, as well as increasing CO₂. Better energy management includes: switching off; replacing inefficient lighting with low energy bulbs; using lower energy controls and 'intelligent switching' systems; choosing low energy/energy efficient equipment when replacing items, and installing insulation.

2 Be responsible:

Buy items you use frequently in bulk or concentrated form to avoid unnecessary packaging. Substitute less toxic or non-toxic products for products such as inks, paints, cleaning products, and chemicals. Reduce unnecessary water use by investing in some water efficiency products.

3 Choose to reuse:

Ask yourselves whether you really need to buy new items? Can stationery folders be reused? More paper re-used? Can you source quality second-hand furniture or computer equipment? Support Freecycle or local swap schemes. Encourage others to re-use via your promotional work. Give people products that highlight reuse rather than one-off gimmicks or balloons. Goods include: durable cotton or jute bags, recycled content notebooks, pens, pencils, key rings.

4 Change to recycled paper:

With high quality paper widely available it's never been easier to buy recycled paper (<http://eaclink.info/?QQJGY>). You won't be the only ones – many large and small organisations have already switched. It helps create markets and makes a statement about your commitment to future-friendly actions.

5 Buy Fairtrade/fairly-traded tea, coffee, and sugar (see <http://eaclink.info/?TOIFI>):

Don't have a blind-spot each day. VCS organisations are grounded in principles of fairness, inclusion and equality. Give others this chance. Fairly traded products help producers overseas access fairer markets as well as providing direct social and environmental benefits.

6 Encourage use of public transport and alternatives to the car. If your organisation needs a vehicle, make it a green one:

Publicise – and incentivise - car-sharing, cycling and walking opportunities as much as you can. Find out about greener vehicles well in advance – don't leave it until the current vehicle breaks down. Switching sooner rather than later may have hidden benefits.

7 Support local producers and/or organic food retailers:

Make a conscious choice when organising events to go for something different. It's getting easier and easier to source local producers, retail outlets and social enterprises that support green and ethical policies. Issues include: seasonal foods, local outlets, fairly traded; organic, low energy etc

8 Recycle as much as you can:

And help close the recycling loop – buy recycled too!

9 Cut your impact:

Review your purchasing policies regularly to see where adjustments can be made. Is there an extra thing you can do to help tackle climate change? And don't forget other options – e.g. animal friendly/cruelty free items, less toxic/biodegradable cleaning materials, wood from sustainable forestry, peat-free soil substitutes, fairly traded goods etc.

10 Spread the word:

Help build collective action by publicising what you are doing and why. People learn and become more aware by listening to others. Don't under-estimate the power of one-to-one informal conversations to help change behaviour. Make it easy for employees and volunteers to offer suggestions. Don't get too worthy – keeping it light and fun is a better way forward.