

## Opportunities to Green Your Business: Resource use and environmental management opportunities

Your organization may find it useful to review the considerations below related to use of natural resources and related environmental impacts. Each area presents companies with opportunities to control costs and reduce impacts through increased efficiencies, purchasing, and recycling and disposal practices.

### Energy & Climate

- Energy use is the major driver of climate change: the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide from fossil fuel use is raising global temperatures, bringing costly and unpredictable changes in precipitation, winds and ocean currents, and possibly leading to more frequent and severe violent weather events such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes.
- Our sources of energy also impose costs on our health and the economy through direct pollution such as smog, particulate pollution and acid rain.
- These changes have potentially massive impacts on biodiversity, rainfall, agriculture and forestry, sea level, and the geographical range of infectious diseases.

### Paper Use

- Paper use remains a major issue as both resource use and waste disposal: paper represents a major form of wood products consumption (40% of all logged trees, according to Resource Conservation Alliance) and makes up more than a third of our waste stream (34% in 2005, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, <http://www.epa.gov/msw/facts.htm>).
- Logging for paper can compromise habitat, biodiversity, water quality and an ecosystem's ability to sequester carbon.
- Paper production usually entails chlorine bleaching, a major source of carcinogens and other chlorine-based pollutants.
- Paper use and purchasing are opportunities to save money and reduce waste while meeting environmental goals.

### Recycling & Reuse

- While recycling rates have increased in many states, Americans continue to generate a tremendous amount of solid waste.
- Much of this ends up in landfills, and its collection, handling and disposal cost organizations significant amounts of financial and human resources.
- While recycling offers many advantages, our deeper goal should be to minimize resource use and extraction—by “closing the loop” or reducing use in the first place.

### Water Use

- By using water efficiently and adapting our needs to regional water supplies, we can meet the needs of businesses, residences and agriculture without degrading this threatened resource or further compromising ecosystems that are threatened by current water withdrawals.

- Because of state health codes, nearly all the water we use is treated. Treated water has concerns that go beyond the draw from our rivers and water tables.
- Large amounts of energy and chemicals are used to pump and purify the water, resulting in hidden air and water pollution concerns as well as climate change impacts.

## **Green Procurement**

- As individual entities and as an aggregate industry, businesses purchase large amounts of products such as paper, computers, printers, copiers, office supplies, cleaning supplies, building materials, office furniture, paint, carpet, food and more.
- By making environmentally preferable purchasing (EPP) choices, organizations can use purchasing as a tool for improving resource use, human health and economic performance in tandem.
- Government and industry have tested only a few hundred of the estimated 70,000 chemicals in common use in the United States for health impacts, and many of those are linked to health and environmental problems.

## **Electronics Manufacture & Disposal**

- Although computer hardware and other electronics products represent a small portion of our waste stream by weight or volume, their impacts are disproportionate through their lifecycle. They can contain chemicals or heavy metals, and other toxic materials that pose the greatest threats through leaching from landfills.
- When they are disposed of improperly, the resulting pollution through groundwater and soil can leave communities with high cancer rates and other health and environmental problems.
- Lifecycle management means we should also address the cost and environmental impacts during all stages of a product's existence, including manufacturing, distribution, the product's useful life, and disposal and/or recycling.

## **Indoor Environmental Quality**

- Many modern building materials and many office items (furniture and supplies) contain caustic or toxic chemicals, many of which cause discomfort or annoyance to building occupants, sometimes lowering immune system vitality.
- Most of us spend 90% of our lives indoors.
- Emerging evidence on high-performance buildings indicates that lighting, airflow and reduction or elimination of chemical exposures can improve productivity and reduce sick days.
- From a financial point of view, indoor environmental quality is an opportunity to improve employee health and productivity.