



Greening the Physician Office

While most of the greenhouse gas emissions from the health care sector are attributed to hospitals and other large facilities, physician offices can also take action to reduce their environmental impact, especially by reducing their energy use. Resources like [My Green Doctor](#) can guide physicians and their staff on how to reduce their carbon footprint and help curb climate change. This document focuses on actions that smaller physician practices can take to make a big improvement to the environmental sustainability of their practice to benefit patients and the planet.

Transportation

Help commuters reduce emissions – Encourage use of mass transit, establish vanpool/carpool programs to make employee commuting more efficient and consider telecommuting for employees. Provide lockers, showers, and bike parking for employees who bike or walk to work.

When selecting an office space, choose a space that is close to public transit.

Energy Efficiency

Reduce your office's energy use by switching to energy efficient light bulbs (CFLs, LED bulbs), adjust thermostats to save energy when appropriate (up a few degrees in the summer, down a few degrees in the winter), and upgrade major equipment to the most energy-efficient model. Maintain and clean your heating and air conditioning system to ensure it is operating at peak efficiency. Optimize the building envelope with better insulation and energy-efficient windows.

Install On-Site Renewable Energy Capability - Facilities can install (or encourage their office building to install) solar panels to generate a portion of facility's energy, and/or solar hot-water heating system.

Reduce Standby Energy Use – Plug computers and other electronic equipment into power strips and turn off when not in use. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, plugged-in electrical equipment may consume energy even when it's powered down. Standby power (or "phantom" loads) can consume up to 5 percent of an electrical plug load. Physician offices may be able to buy renewable energy from their utility company in addition to installing on-site renewable energy systems.ⁱ

Purchase Green Power – Use power generated from renewable sources like wind and solar.

Purchase Energy-Efficient Productsⁱⁱ – Buy Energy Star or Federal Energy Management Program-designated products.

Request an energy audit for your office - Your utility provider may be able to perform an energy audit to help you set your energy efficiency goals.

Seek out office buildings that are LEED certified or have earned an Energy Star rating. Such certification can help to ensure that your office building is making efficient use of resources and keeping greenhouse gas emissions down. More information on Energy Star buildings can be found [here](#).

Information on LEED certified buildings can be found [here](#).

Waste

Recycle and buy recycled products – *Recycle all recyclable products, including electronics.* Commit your office to reduce, reuse, and recycle whenever possible. According to the Healthcare Environmental Resource Center, the U.S. healthcare industry generates nearly 2 billion pounds of paper and cardboard a year.ⁱⁱⁱ Paper use can be decreased by printing on both sides of a sheet of paper and/or using a smaller font and by paying bills electronically.^{iv} If your practice contracts with a paper shredder service to meet privacy law requirements, make sure that they recycle shredded material.^v Procurement staff should purchase items that are made of recycled materials. Consult the [EPA Comprehensive Procurement Guideline Program](#) for additional information.

Replace bottled drinking water with a water cooler or filtered tap water. Globally, about 20,000 plastic bottles are made each second, contributing pollution and clogging landfills.^{vi} Waste can be reduced by using water coolers, reusable drinking containers, and filtered tap water.

Use cloth instead of disposable paper for linens and gowns. Also ensure that your laundry service provider practices in an environmentally sustainable manner.

Resources

My Green Doctor <http://www.mygreendoctor.org/>

Energy Star “Build an Energy Program” https://www.energystar.gov/industrial_plants/build-energy-management-program

Environmental Protection Agency – Center for Corporate Climate Leadership
<https://www.epa.gov/climateleadership>

ⁱ My Green Doctor Web site. Accessed at <http://www.mygreendoctor.org/workbook-2-introduction/>

ⁱⁱ Health Care Without Harm and Practice GreenHealth. Addressing Climate Change in the Health Care Setting: Opportunities for Action. Accessed at <https://practicegreenhealth.org/pubs/toolkit/reports/ClimateChange.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Healthcare Environmental Resource Center. Paper Recycling. Accessed at <http://www.hercenter.org/wastereduction/paper.cfm>

^{iv} U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Reducing Waste: What You Can Do. April 8, 2016. Accessed at <https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-waste-what-you-can-do#Tips%20for%20Work>

^v Bank of America Merrill Lynch. Becoming and Environmentally Friendly Medical Practice. White Paper. 2014. Accessed at

<http://corp.bankofamerica.com/documents/10157/67594/Becoming%20an%20Environmentally%20Friendly%20Medical%20Practice.pdf>

^{vi} <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jun/28/a-million-a-minute-worlds-plastic-bottle-binge-as-dangerous-as-climate-change>