



10 Ten in 10 Series: #2

10 Things to Recycle Besides Paper, Plastic or Glass

We're all trying to be more environmentally friendly, especially at home. From recycling more to changing the way we view our energy consumption. But what about your workspace? Sure, your office recycles. Paper, plastic and glass, right? That's a nice start, but there are many other ways to help improve the environment and reduce landfill waste, especially if you're planning to remodel your office space. Check out this list – and helpful links – from printer cartridges and batteries, to chemicals and carpet, let's all take the next step together.

1. Toner

25 million printer cartridges go to landfills each month. One of the easiest things all offices can and should do is recycle their toner cartridges. You'll reduce petroleum usage and landfill waste for starters. Toner cartridge remanufacturing saves over 38,000 tons of plastic and metal from landfills. Consider also, that more than 3 quarts of oil are used to produce each laser cartridge and the plastic used in each printer cartridge takes more than 10 centuries to decompose. (<http://www.recycleplace.com/>)

2. Electronics

If you're planning to replace any office equipment, be sure to properly dispose of your old stuff so it can be recycled. Electronic waste is a leading cause of environmental pollution. For example, the average television contains approximately 8 pounds of lead, the average computer contains 2.5 pounds. Recent studies found that of the tens' of millions of consumer electronics, such as computers, CRTs, and televisions purchased each year in the U.S.A., over 70% of such products are currently disposed of in landfills. (California Recycles)

3. Batteries

One of the most common – and deadliest – materials in landfills today are batteries. Some 40 billion batteries are disposed of every year. Filled with toxic materials that seep into the ground they poison water supplies and more. Fortunately, there are simple solutions to this. To start, try rechargeable batteries, which are 32 times less harmful than their single-use cousins. Also, you can register at [batteryrecycling.com](http://www.batteryrecycling.com) for a recycling kit and leave the package in your breakroom (<http://www.batteryrecycling.com/new+irecycle+kits/>). Collect the batteries and ship them off. It's that easy.

4. Styrofoam

Made from petroleum and not biodegradable, styrofoam – polystyrene – is a scar on our technological history. It's ubiquitous and yet until recently, there was no good way to dispose of it. Fortunately, cities are starting to ban its use, but even more encouraging are efforts to recycle the material on large scales. If your city still does not accept styrofoam in its recycling containers, there are plenty of resources out there that do.

5. Cell Phones

There are more than 500 million used cell phones in the U.S. sitting in people's drawers or worse, in our landfills, and another 130 million will be added this year alone! Cell phones contain toxic materials such as lead, mercury, beryllium, arsenic, cadmium, and antimony. If incinerated these substances can pollute the air, in landfills they can leach into groundwater (<http://www.recyclemycellphone.org/recycle.cfm>) Right up there with batteries, cell phones are disposed of in huge quantities and just as batteries. Upgrading your staff's phones? Be sure you collect – and recycle – their old ones.

6. Hazardous Materials

From paint to cleaning fluids to motor oil to pesticides, every office environment is loaded with Household Hazardous



Materials (HHM). The EPA reported that, in 2007, only about 1.8 million tons of hazardous wastes were managed by recycling (including metals, solvents, or other material recovery). This amount is less than 5 percent of all hazardous waste managed in 2007. That's not much. Disposing these materials down a drain seems harmless enough but could have lasting environmental effects. Instead consider collecting them in a safe place and once a year taking them to a your community HHW collection site.

7. Aerosol Cans

Did you know that most aerosol cans are made of steel and contain 25% recycled materials? Empty aerosol cans – think spray paint, air fresheners and spray glues – can be recycled. So don't just toss them, recycle them.

8. Plastic Bags

You may be recycling these at home already. Adding a container to your breakroom to collect those bags we all bring in from take out lunches would be a simple – and highly visible – way to promote recycling on your office. Besides the typical plastic shopping bag, these types of plastic “bags” can also be collected: newspaper bags, dry cleaning bags, bread bags, produce bags, toilet paper, napkin, and paper towel wraps, furniture wrap, electronic wrap, plastic retail bags (hard plastic and string handles removed), grocery bag, zip lock bags (remove hard components), plastic cereal box liners (if it tears like paper do not include), plastic shipping envelopes (no bubble wrap/remove labels), case wrap (e.g., snacks, water bottles), all clean, dry bags labeled #2 or #4. (http://www.plasticbagrecycling.org/plasticbag/s01_consumers.html)

9. Carpet

Used carpet and rugs generated nationwide in 2001, amounted to around 2.6 million tons, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Characterization of Municipal Solid Waste. Sadly, due to unfavorable market conditions, including limited demand for recovered nylon and other carpet plastics and the relatively low cost of raw materials, there are limited opportunities for carpet recycling in the U.S. However, in January, 2002, California joined with several other states, the US EPA and the carpet industry in an effort to divert 40 percent of waste carpet generated by 2012. Now, used carpets may be used as a component to produce other products such as auto parts, carpet pad, plastic lumber, and parking stops. If you're remodeling, make sure all that carpet does not get trashed (<http://www.cal-recycle.ca.gov/ConDemo/Carpet/>)

10. Scrap Metal

Most scrap metal – think filing cabinets, appliances, machinery, demolition scrap and wiring – can be easily collected and recycled. Among other things, recycling scrap metal reduces landfill waste, reduces the need for mining and lowers production costs for metal manufacturers.

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