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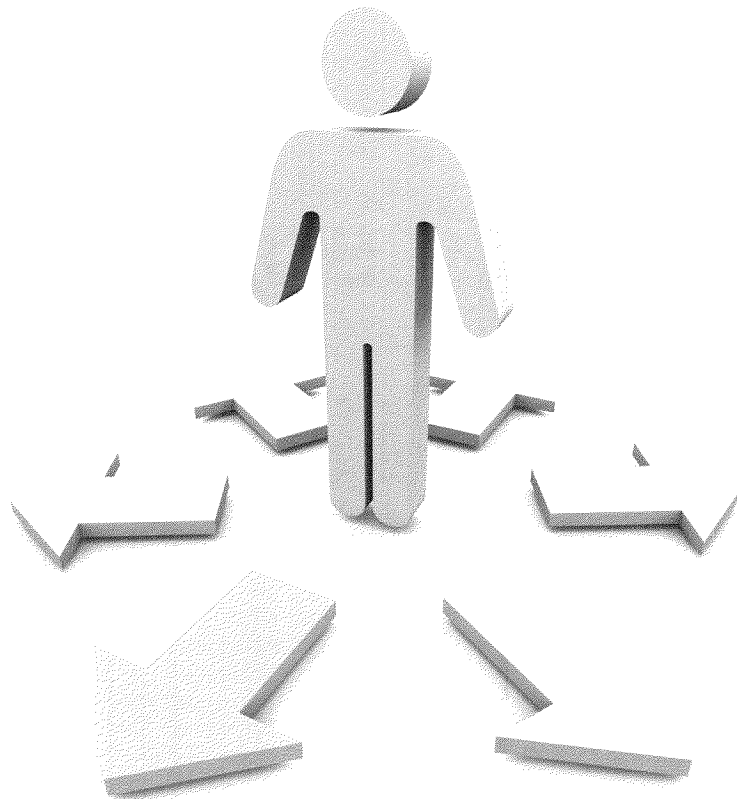
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Get on the green path

Buying office supplies and equipment that is less harmful to the environment doesn't have to cost the earth. As ANDY HOLLIS discovered, by embracing the concept of green procurement, PAs can save money and boost the firm's green credentials

GREEN OFFICE



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Environmentally responsible purchasing, or green procurement, is big business in the public sector and is spreading to private companies. Councils in particular are increasing their efforts to reduce their environmental impact. And it is getting easier for private firms to increase their corporate social responsibility to meet government and consumer pressure, and to cut costs.

Recycling bins and low-energy light bulbs are commonplace in many offices, but there is much more PAs can do to be more environmentally friendly. Matt Roper, CEO of the Green Buying website said: "Green procurement is buying products that are made or operate in a way that uses fewer resources and have a longer life span, contain fewer hazardous materials, consume less energy and water in the production or use, and can be reused or recycled when they are no longer needed. They generate less waste, for example being made from recycled materials, and use less packaging or packaging that can be recycled by the supplier."

Save your pennies

"Throwing things away wastes money" continues Matt, "so if you can reuse items you are going to save money. Going green doesn't have to cost more. Even if the product might be more expensive to start with, when you consider the energy savings over the life of the product the difference is minimal." The website sells a range of goods including biodegradable cups and cutlery, ecological cleaning products, non-toxic paint products, recycled stationery and office supplies, renewable electricity and equipment for providing filtered drinking water, so staff do not need to buy bottled water.

The City seems to be leading the way, with The Mayor of London's Green Procurement Code. This free support service is for London-based organisations committed to reducing their environmental impact, but offers some useful advice for others wishing to follow suit. There is plenty of scope to shop around for the best prices. In 2006, members of the Green Procurement Code purchased from 244 different suppliers compared

with 125 in 2005, and the business is still growing.

By making informed choices about the products you buy you can make a real difference to the environment and save money. Try to use suppliers who stick to an environmental policy, preferably with an environmental management system and a recognised environmental standard. And remember, the ultimate green procurement is avoiding the purchase altogether.

Reduce, reuse and recycle

Ask yourself whether the business actually needs the product and check there is not something sitting redundant that could be cleaned up and given another life. Avoid products that would end up in landfill or an incinerator at the end of their lives, and try to recycle electrical goods, complying with the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive where you can.

If your office has a kitchen for staff to use, when buying or replacing a fridge or oven look at the EC energy label and try to buy the most energy efficient product. Pick products with propane or butane coolants as an alternative to CFCs and HCFCs.

Green power

Try to get your electricity supply, or as high a proportion as you can, from renewable sources such as wind and solar plants. If this is not possible then request energy from combined heat and power sources. Opt for rechargeable batteries which have a longer life than disposable ones and can generally be re-charged up to 400 times.

Cleaning products

Avoid aerosols unless absolutely necessary. Pump sprays or creams offer an alternative without emitting harmful gases - you can also buy refill packs to cut packaging waste. Detergents that are 100 per cent biodegradable and phosphate free; vegetable-based soap; and water-based products are all better for the environment than their alternatives. Also be aware that toilet cleaners containing paradichlorobenzene (PDCB) are hazardous to wildlife. ☹

CONTACTS

- www.ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/pdf/int.pdf
- www.greenbuying.co.uk
- www.nigelsecostore.com
- www.greenelectricity.org
- www.londonremade.com