Checklist for a Healthy Home

Tips for a Greener & Healthier Office & Work Space

☐ **Liven it up and create a green space with plants!**

Improve your work environment and maybe even your performance with some plants in the office. A good environment is necessary for any employee to achieve optimum performance. In many workplaces, the air is dry and can contain airborne pollutants causing health problems such as dry throat, headache, dizziness, fatigue, eye, airways and skin irritation, and coughing. Did you know that many plants – such as Gerber daisies, philodendrons, and peace lilies – absorb airborne pollutants? Plants also release moisture into the air, absorb heat and noise, and absorb and break down harmful substances. Each different plant has an affinity for different pollutants, so place more than one in the office and feel better about yourself and your work. As a rule of green thumb, try placing two or three plants in 8-inch or 10-inch pots for every 100 square feet of floor space.

☐ **Clean it green!**

You should always be sure to give your desk, keyboard, phone and other office items a cleaning every now and then – hopefully more often than not. Try wiping down your office with eco-friendly, multipurpose cleaners and/or wipes. But make sure the "natural" cleaning product you might be using is actually eco-friendly as sometimes it's more of a marketing gimmick than actual truth. Oftentimes, cleaning products contain many toxic ingredients, some of which are not even always listed on the labels. Check your cleaning products for toxic ingredients and make notice of the warning labels. If you must use chemicals in your office, always be sure to use products to manufacturer specifications and use them in well-ventilated areas.

Want something better? Use natural cleaning products that are chemical-free. You may be surprised at how well natural, green cleaning products work. Even common household products like baking soda, vinegar, and citrus juices often have the power to clean as well or better than their chemical counterparts. If possible, try some alternatives to chemical-laden products when you clean your office, found at the Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE) website: www.womenforahealthyenvironment.org -- Just look under the "Greening Tips" section of the "Green Resources" tab.

- **Conserve and recycle paper.**

  Did you know that the average employee uses about 10,000 sheets of paper per year? When it comes to documents, proposals, emails, memos, and more, print only what is absolutely necessary. When you don't need a document any longer, recycle the paper. Not only will this save on the cost of ink and paper office supplies, but it will also save some trees.

- **Be picky about your plastics.**

  When it comes time for lunch, learn to be picky about your plastics. Some plastics contain bisphenol A (or BPA), which is linked to cancer, or other toxins not healthy for the body. It's best to not microwave in plastic containers. Instead, use glass cookware when possible. If you are going to eat or drink from plastics, check the labeled number inside the triangle on the bottom of the container. Only use those numbered #1, #2, #4, or #5 as they contain polyethylene or polypropylene and require the use of less toxic additives and are nonchlorinated.

- **Don't put that in the trash! Dispose of items properly.**

  Be sure to dispose of office electronics, batteries, and ink cartridges in the proper manner. Ink cartridges alone can take up to 450 years to decompose! Instead of throwing these items away improperly, look for and become aware of recycling drop off areas in your workplace or local area, recycling events, and other facilities that will recycle and reuse salvageable materials.
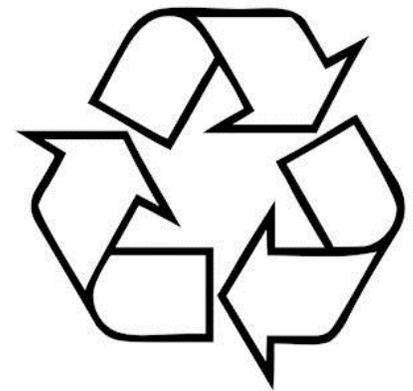
- **Decrease office energy use.**

  According to the Department of Energy, office buildings account for 28% of commercial energy demand. You can help minimize this percentage by doing small things in your office, such as adjusting the sleep mode on the computer to begin after five minutes of idle time. Even your screensaver is wasting energy. Set your screensaver to "blank" or "none" to avoid wasting more energy. Desktop computers can cause 1500 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Simply changing the sleep mode settings on your computer, getting rid of your screensaver, putting office machines such as photocopiers on "power save" or "standby" mode when not in use, and even just shutting the lights out when you're not in the office can greatly reduce energy consumption. So power down eve rything before you leave the office and even unplug the power strip they might be plugged in to in order to save even more energy.

- **Take the stairs.**

  Not only can taking the stairs be better for you than taking the elevator, but it's also better for conserving energy. Climbing stairs burns up to 10 times more calories than standing in an elevator. Also, an elevator's yearly usage can equal the amount of energy used to power seven homes each year! If possible, it's better for you and the environment to take the stairs.