

2009 How Gonzales Can Keep “Growing Green” at Work

By Maury Treleven, Gonzales Grows Green consulting project manager

Remember, keep doing what you do...The efforts you already make during your work day are important and they add up! When you save energy and conserve natural resources you also save money that is used to pay salaries, benefits and fund services and quality of life projects for the community. Here is a review of what you’re already doing and how you can do even more.

Energy Savings

Your “Lights Out” policy is saving energy and money. Keep turning lights off in unoccupied offices, conference rooms, copy rooms and work areas. Continue to minimize AC use (PG&E recommends keeping the heat turned down to 68° and the air conditioning set at 78°).

More Energy Savings

Avoid phantom power usage (stand-by power) by shutting down your computer and UPS or surge protector at the end of the day. Unplug all phone and battery chargers when not in use (gardening equipment battery chargers too). Attach all audio visual equipment to SMART power strips and keep them off when not in use. Attach paper shredders to power strip and keep off when not in use. LCD computer monitors do not need screen savers (disabling the screen saver saves energy). Frequently cleaning or replacing filters on heating units saves energy and hundreds of pounds of CO2 per year

Reduce Paper Consumption & Need for Office Supplies

Continue recycling shipping envelopes, use two sided printing and copying, sharing documents digitally and bagging the paper from the paper shredder (place it in the mixed recycling bin).

Next step...

Keep collecting reusable paper from the fax machine and add a paper collection tray for one-sided misprints to the copy room. From time-to-time, collect and cut paper into quarters with paper cutter and use instead of note pads and post-it notes (a great task for students doing community service at City Hall). Reuse tabbed file folders by turning them in-side-out and relabeling the tab. Return usable folders to a special spot in the supply room for others to use. Not every project needs a pristine file folder.

Other tips...

Printing from the Internet? Use “Print Preview” to avoid printing unwanted pages. In the printer driver window under “page range,” fill in the bubble “pages” and select only the page number you want. Also, save colored ink when you select “Print in Grayscale” (in the printer driver window under preferences, color).

Get Organized

Clean out your desk and office regularly. This will free up much needed storage space. Return excess office supplies like note pads, message pads, post-it notes, boxes of staples and (especially) usable pens and pencils to the office supply room. This will cut down on office supply expenses right away. Remember...clutter stifles creativity.

Recycling

Continue to...Recycle office printer cartridges, collect bottles and cans (CRV) and separate mixed recycling for weekly pickup. Collect batteries and electronic waste for safe recycling. If you have specific questions about mixed recycling, please contact Maury Treleven.

More Ideas

Ideas Specific to Public Works

Consider use of biolubricants and recycled content oil. ASTM Certified products are now available and more competitively priced.

As replacements are needed for gas powered 2 cycle engine equipment, consider replacing them with rechargeable battery powered equipment. Rechargeable battery technology is much improved. Battery powered equipment reduces the need for hearing protection. There are no gas vapor issues for employees or the public and eliminating 2 cycle engines improves air quality and cuts GHG emissions.

Cutting Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Consider carpooling, bicycling or walking to work. Gonzales is less than one mile across. Only use your vehicle when you need it. Walking and biking provides exercise while you commute.

Lunch & Coffee

“Brown bagging” your lunch **saves you money** and reduces use of disposable food packaging. Use washable containers instead of disposable packaging like aluminum foil, plastic bags and plastic wrap. In fact, skip the brown bag all together and bring your lunch in a reusable cloth bag.

Dining out? If you are getting it “to go” skip the plastic bag if you can carry it out without it. When they hand you a pile of napkins, only take the number of napkins you need and politely hand the rest back.

Eliminate disposable coffee cups. Bring your own mug to work and extra ones to share with guests (everyone has a few extra at home). Hold a contest for the most outrageous coffee mug (Keep it appropriate for a working environment!).

For pot lucks and special events, eliminate Styrofoam plates and cups (for sure). Replace with paper and think about putting together a reusable set (including utensils). Everyone has a few mismatched pieces at home.

Other Things for Your Consideration

Polystyrene (Styrofoam) “Tricky Number 6”

If you asked me what is the one thing I could do that would help the environment, I would say, “Get Styrofoam out of your life.” **Why?** This product is “technically” recyclable but it’s not recyclable in the Salinas Valley or many other places for that matter. It continues US dependence on petroleum, never biodegrades in a landfill (Styrofoam is FOREVER) and contributes heavily to pollution in the ocean and our waterways (just take a look in the

Gonzales Slough). While reusable is best, there is not a need to purchase fancy biodegradable substitutes. Paper plates and cups are a more environmental sound choice for Gonzales.

The Bottled Water Disaster

First, don't ever refill water bottles...it's not safe! Even manufacturers will tell you that the bottles are only designed for a single use. Don't put them in the dishwasher to disinfect. Over time, bacteria and black mold grow in the bottles and caps and the heat of washing causes bottles begin to degrade (possibly leaching chemicals as they do).

If you said you could do two things to help the environment, I would say," Stop purchasing bottled water and purchase a reusable container." **Why?** Purchasing drinks in one-serving disposable plastic bottles continues US dependence on petroleum. Bottled water companies have convinced Americans that their municipal water sources are unsafe. With a few exceptions, this is totally UNTRUE. It is untrue in Gonzales (read your annual water report). Did you know that most bottled water comes from municipal water sources? You know, like the one your tap water at home comes from. According to the Container Recycling Institute, America consumed almost 30 Billion containers of WATER ALONE in the year 2005. Sources state that anywhere from 80-90% of all plastic beverage containers are NOT RECYCLED. Where do they go? Landfills? YES. It is estimated that it takes 700 years for a plastic bottle to biodegrade in a landfill. Where else? Have you heard of the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch"?

To learn more, watch this 7 minute video of Captain Charles Moore who discovered and named the Great Pacific Garbage Patch:

http://www.ted.com/talks/capt_charles_moore_on_the_seas_of_plastic.html

Cleaning Green

Commercial non-toxic cleaning products are now (and always have been) available and are reasonably priced. Green cleaning products for the home are very inexpensive and easy to make yourself. Those who clean for others, especially women, carry the chemical burden for all. University and government funded health studies continue to find components of cleaning chemicals in human blood samples and samples of breast milk.

Research, Read & Decide for Yourself...

You can follow the link below to read the 2007 Women's Voices for the Earth report by Alexandra Gorman which sites NIH and EPA case studies and reports (amongst others) that address issues surrounding chemical cleaning products and their affect on human health.

<http://www.womenandenvironment.org/campaignsandprograms/SafeCleaning/HazardsReport.pdf>

This document presents you with a lot of choices...Choose the ones that make sense for you and your department. Don't try to implement these changes all at once. When you accomplish one, try another. Keep doing what you're doing. You do make a difference.