



México

Misión Permanente de México ante los
Organismos Internacionales en Ginebra



BEST PRACTICES HANDBOOK

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR BEING
SUSTAINABLE AT WORK



México

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los Organismos Internacionales
en Ginebra

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PRESENTATION

In a global context marked by interconnected crises, sustainable development has become an urgent priority. Mexico has reaffirmed its commitment to a foreign policy that places multilateral cooperation, human rights, and sustainability at its core as unifying pillars.

From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we promote a vision that articulates respect for the environment with inclusion, equity, and intergenerational justice.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation are not future threats, but realities that already unequally impact the most vulnerable populations.

Faced with this situation, it is the duty of States, institutions, and citizens to act with shared responsibility to guarantee the right to a healthy environment and ensure decent living conditions for present and future generations. Sustainability is a collective and urgent task, and its success depends on our capacity for cooperation, awareness, and transformation.

This Best Practices Handbook seeks to translate international commitments into concrete actions. With simple changes in the way we work, consume, and interact with our environment, we can reduce our environmental footprint and contribute, from every office and every person, to building a more sustainable future and present.

Enrique Ochoa

Deputy Secretary for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015, established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that would ensure “peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future.” These goals recognize that action to improve the lives and well-being of people across the globe must go hand in hand with action to address climate change and preserve land and sea.



SDG 13 (Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) recognizes the importance of transitioning our energy, land-use, industrial systems, and urban infrastructure practices to limit climate change and work toward sustainable development. Other SDGs include clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), among others.



Although countries are beginning to take positive steps by pledging nationally determined contributions (NDCs) in response to climate change, these plans, as they stand, will not be sufficient to achieve the 2030 goals, and more ambitious targets are urgently needed.



To achieve major changes at the national and international levels, all sectors must contribute to reducing the effects of climate change by decarbonizing their operations, measuring and recording their carbon footprint, and setting ambitious reduction targets.



THE 2050Today INITIATIVE

United for zero emissions

2050Today was created as an initiative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from international institutions in Geneva and promote best practices in the offices located there.

In collaboration with the Swiss Mission in Geneva, the Mexican Mission, along with other diplomatic missions, United Nations (UN) organizations, and other international organizations, as members of 2050Today, share knowledge, experiences, solutions, and concrete measures to reduce their carbon emissions.

This initiative recognizes Geneva's symbolic role as the European headquarters of the UN and aims to strengthen its image through innovation and solidarity in the field of climate change.

This report has been made possible thanks to the collaboration of the University of Geneva and the 2050Today Initiative.

The Best Practices Handbook is an important component of the communication and training axis of the Environmental Action Plan of the Permanent Mission of Mexico.



It is essential to adopt immediate, concrete and continuous reduction measures, otherwise the objective will never be achieved within the established timeframe.

OBJECTIVES OF THE GOOD PRACTICES HANDBOOK

The Best Practices Handbook serves as a guide for improving the office environment and making it more environmentally and people-friendly. It also provides information, tips, and ideas for transforming behavioral and structural norms to reduce the Mission's carbon footprint.

The Handbook covers six components: **energy**, **water**, **waste**, **mobility**, **food consumption**, and **the purchase of materials and supplies**.

Specific objectives:

1. Reduce the carbon footprint of office operations.
2. Improve and encourage sustainable behavior among office staff.
3. Provide information on the different aspects of climate change, its environmental impact, and its relationship to workplace practices.

Principles:

1. Commitment to environmental procedures and policy.
2. Establishment of environmental objectives and action plans.
3. Promotion of environmental awareness among staff.
4. Monitoring and tracking progress.

Note: This Handbook will not consider changes to infrastructure and equipment, as this is not currently feasible under the austerity measures mandated by Mexican legislation. Should this situation change, targets for energy-efficient computing devices, facilities, and other tools could make a significant difference to long-term carbon emissions.

ENERGY

Energy production worldwide is the leading cause of climate change, accounting for approximately 76% of total global greenhouse gas emissions (Climate Watch, 2018). As more efficient technologies are designed and built, office buildings are becoming increasingly energy-efficient.

However, the proportion of energy use is also increasing in all building types (including homes, offices, and factories) around the world. Studies have found that 33% of greenhouse gas emissions in the United Kingdom and 17% in the United States come from shared buildings in the business sector, excluding industrial

zones (DECC, 2011; United States Department of State, 2010).

Buildings contribute significantly to global CO2 emissions. In 2017, buildings accounted for nearly 40% of total emissions through the energy they use and the carbon emitted to create it. Buildings and their construction also collectively account for 36% of global energy use (UNEP, 2018). Operational carbon emissions (i.e., emissions created during daily energy use) account for around 28% of emissions each year worldwide.



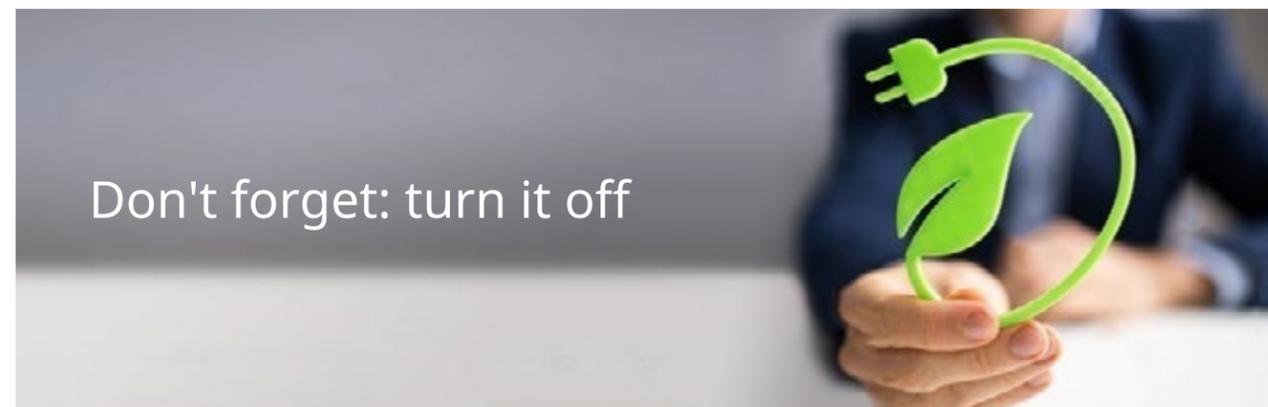
ENERGY IN THE WORKPLACE

Efforts to limit energy use and improve energy efficiency in the workplace can have a huge impact on reducing carbon emissions and can also be a cost-saving measure for organizations. However, the change doesn't have to involve large investments in energy-efficient appliances.

Small, simple changes in everyday behavior, such as using equipment more efficiently or turning off unused appliances, can make a big difference.

For example, standby power (or phantom power), that is electricity used by appliances or devices while they are turned off, not performing their primary functions, or are in standby mode.

Almost all equipment with an external power supply draws power continuously, often without any clear external signal that they are doing so. The standby load caused by a computer and monitor consumes approximately 21.9 kWh/year*, and an additional laptop raises this to 30.7 kWh/year (Hydro Quebec, n.d.). In a typical office, where each employee has at least one computer and one monitor, this figure can quickly increase. Reducing the standby load can be easily done by unplugging devices or turning them off at the power outlet.



* **Note:** 1 kWh is the amount of energy you would use if you ran a 1,000-watt appliance for one hour.

REDUCE YOUR USE

Small efforts can make a difference

Electronic devices

1. Unplug or turn off all electrical appliances after working hours (Don't forget the shared resources!).
2. Turn off the computer monitor or put it in sleep mode during lunch.
3. Share resources whenever possible.

Lighting

1. Turn off the light when not needed.
2. Take advantage of natural light whenever possible, especially in summer.
3. Use eco-friendly or low-consumption light bulbs.

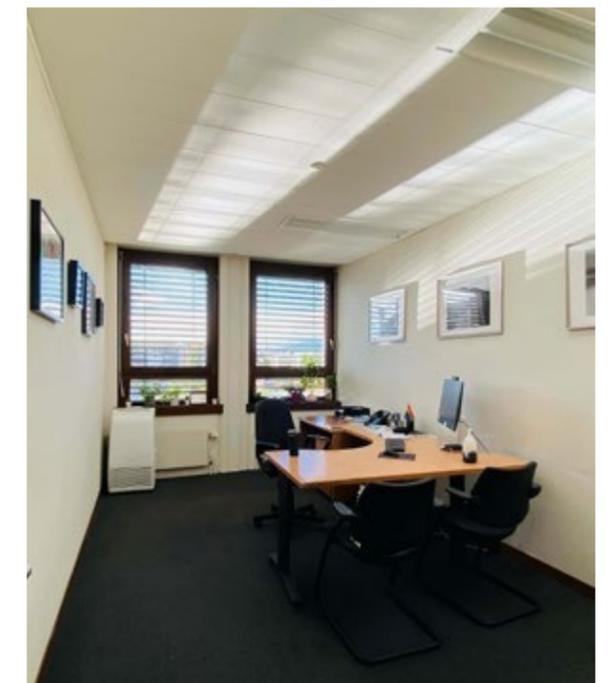
Heating and cooling

1. Reduce equipment use whenever possible: ventilate with open windows or wear extra layers when it's colder.

2. Close blinds after working hours. It can aid in the building's natural insulation by keeping out colder air during the winter or keeping out bright sun during the summer.

Ecological events

1. Events like Earth Hour encourage us all to reduce our collective carbon footprint.
2. Offices can also set their own energy-reduction challenges.



WATER

Climate change is intimately linked to the water cycle. As the effects of climate change increase, severe weather events such as droughts and floods also increase, while ordinary seasonal cycles, such as monsoon rains, become stronger and more chaotic.

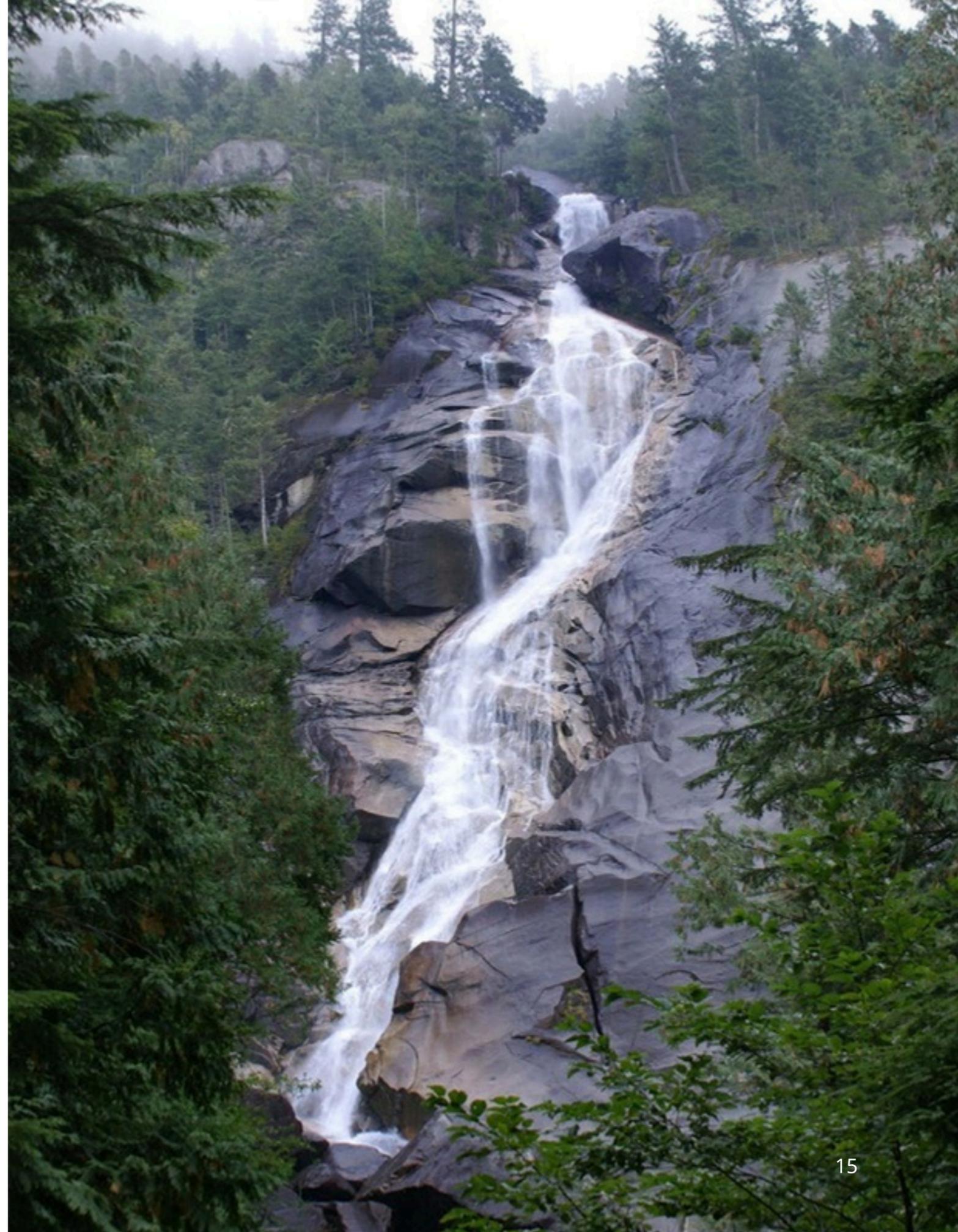
This is because these effects can influence how, when, and where precipitation occurs. Rising global temperatures cause water to vaporize in greater quantities, which in turn leads to more intense and heavier rainfall in the coming years. In monsoon areas, scientists have recorded extremely intense rainfall occurring in increasingly shorter periods.

All of this may make some wonder why water scarcity is a problem. In fact, although the total world water supply is high, only 3% of this water is freshwater. Of this 3%, only 0.5% is available for drinking, and the rest is locked away in glaciers, polar ice, the atmosphere, and other sources of water vegetation or soil (IUCN, 2018).

Moreover, some are too polluted to be usable. With the growing demand for water due to population growth, safeguarding this resource to meet global needs is a difficult task.

Furthermore, heavy rainfall, rising sea levels, flooding, droughts, and desertification have become growing problems in many parts of the world, depleting groundwater reserves, causing pollution, and even jeopardizing food security.

The dwindling water supply doesn't just affect our drinking water. A 2016 report by the International Food Policy Research Institute concluded that 4.8 billion people and approximately half of global cereal production would be at risk of water stress by 2050 without significant changes in our practices.

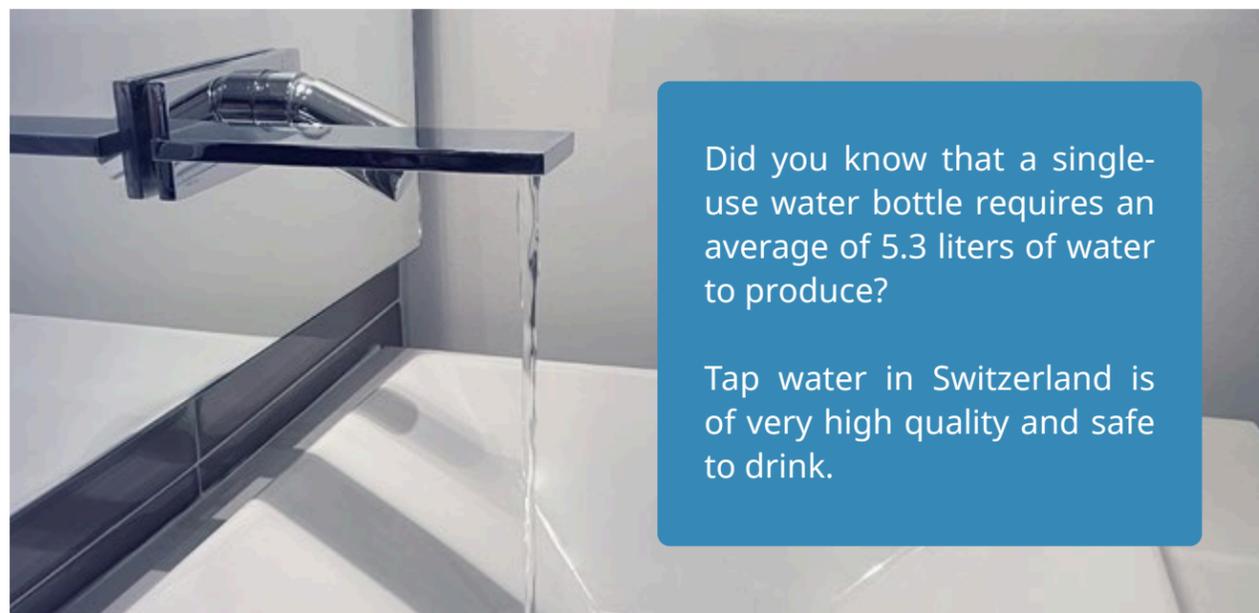


REDUCING WATER CONSUMPTION

It is essential that we begin to consider water as a finite resource that must be conserved. Reducing our water use can help minimize the effects of water scarcity and drought, and alleviate pressure on river basins and natural wetlands. It also reduces the amount of energy we use to process, heat, and transport water.

Some changes are infrastructure-related, such as leak repair and maintenance of heating and cooling systems, while others are behavioral changes, such as using the smallest flush on the toilet when possible or not letting the water run while using it in the kitchen.

Research has shown that the largest amount of water consumption in the workplace comes from restrooms and kitchens, while temperature control systems also consume large amounts of water. For this reason, it is important to consider the amount of water used in these areas, which are greatly affected by workplace behavior.



MONITOR YOUR WATER FOOTPRINT

Take advantage of opportunities

1. Fix or report leaks.
2. Use a full flush only when necessary.
3. Drink tap water instead of buying bottled water.
4. Fill the dishwasher before using it.
5. Turn off the faucet while washing dishes or using soap in the sink.
6. Use only enough water for your needs.
7. Install aerators on faucets. It can reduce water consumption by up to 6-7 liters per minute.
8. Ensure heating and cooling systems receive regular maintenance.
9. Find ways to recycle water instead of throwing it away, such as keeping office plants hydrated.



WASTE

Humans generate 2.01 billion tons of municipal waste each year. This figure increases annually as a result of population growth, urbanization, and economic growth. By 2050, the amount of waste is expected to increase to 3.4 billion tons (World Bank, n.d.). Currently, half of the waste we produce is not collected, processed, or disposed of safely.

Both the production of waste and our failure to process it safely have significant consequences for wildlife, the environment, and human health. In addition to the growing amount of waste we generate, a growing percentage of it is composed of non-biodegradable and polluting materials that can remain in our environment for hundreds of years without decomposing safely.

The clearest example is single-use plastics, which can release harmful chemicals as they slowly degrade before breaking down into microplastics that are harmful to wildlife and the ecosystem. In some cases, plastics are burned alongside

other waste in open landfills, releasing dangerous levels of carbon dioxide and contributing to climate change.

Landfills are a leading cause of methane gas emissions worldwide, and research suggests that by 2025 they will be responsible for up to 10% of all greenhouse gas emissions (ISWA, 2016). Landfills near the coast can leak hazardous materials into the ocean, while poorly treated sewage and improperly collected waste can flow into rivers, polluting waterways and ending up in the oceans.

The waste we generate can be incredibly harmful, not only to the environment but also to our health, with the poorest being the most affected. Approximately 60 million people live within 50 kilometers of the 50 largest landfills of the world (Statista, 2019). These landfills are dangerous places for people to live. Hygiene and diseases are obvious problems, just like pollution, poverty and crime.



RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND MANAGEMENT

Although it's not the only factor, responsible and thoughtful consumption is a way to reduce the amount of waste in our environment. There is a growing social movement in favor of conserving and reusing products instead of buying them again. This change in behavior isn't always as simple as it seems.

Because cheap and accessible products sometimes make consumption the easiest or most profitable option. But while unsustainable production is a

significant factor, at the individual level, we can choose to refuse to buy products when we can or buy reusable or ethical products.

Although this chapter focuses on waste, it is important to remember that the issue of consumption is not only about the waste of the final product, but also about all the processes involved in the production of goods before they reach our homes or offices. Many of us have heard of the three R's (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) and little by little other



"R"s are being added to this list, such as Refuse, Recover, Rethink, Reuse, Repair. Regardless of which word you choose, the most important thing is to consider the impact of your decisions regarding daily purchases, uses, and waste.

KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR WASTE

Think

1. Consume less. Be conscious of what you buy and how you buy it: do you really need it?

2. Be prepared before leaving home; it can help you avoid waste. For example, remember to bring a tote bag or your food containers if you plan to buy lunch or go shopping.

3. Be innovative with repurposing items. Even single-use items can be repurposed for other purposes.

4. Learn what you can and can't recycle. This is very important to ensure that appropriate materials

are placed in the correct containers and recycled properly.

Change

1. Avoid single-use items by choosing reusable items such as water bottles, food containers, or metal straws.

2. Go paperless. If you must print, use recycled paper and print on both sides of the sheet.

3. Use shared trash cans in a common area instead of personal ones. This saves on trash bags and encourages recycling. It's also a good excuse to get up and stretch.



4. Refuse to buy over-packaged items or choose products with less packaging.

5. Wash containers and other recyclable items before placing them in the bin. This will prevent contamination of other items and prevent your bin from smelling bad. Contaminated items will not be recycled.

Support

1. Start a battery and other electronics collection at your office. These products can be recycled at special centers and can be dangerous to dispose of with regular trash.

2. Reuse paper that has only been printed on one side. Keep a stack of this paper next to photocopiers for common use.

3. Swap products. This is a good way to avoid waste when food or other items are no longer needed. Offer unused furniture when you move or perishable items before the holidays. Someone else might find them useful.

MOBILITY

Transport produces approximately 24% of global carbon emissions and is both one of the fastest-growing sources of carbon emissions and fossil fuel consumption in the world (World Bank, 2012). Driving has a huge impact on climate change, and increasing urbanization around the world means the problem won't go away anytime soon. Although electric and even hydrogen cars are beginning to appear on the market, the cost of these vehicles makes access highly restricted. There is also a growing market for SUVs worldwide, which are more fuel-efficient than smaller or lighter vehicles. A decade ago, demand for SUVs worldwide accounted for 17% of car sales per year, but by 2020, this figure had risen to 39%. Between 2010 and 2018, this demand was the second-largest contributor to the increase in global CO2 emissions (Timperley, 2020).

New vehicles tend to be more energy-efficient, but they're still far from achieving the necessary changes in the global energy system to meet the energy-related SDGs. For this reason, reducing carbon emissions from transport cannot rely solely on new technologies, but also on reducing transport use as a whole.

In addition to reducing global carbon emissions, reducing the use of personalized vehicles can also have significant health and well-being benefits. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) estimates that ambient air pollution is responsible for 4.2 million deaths annually related to stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, and chronic respiratory diseases. A shocking 91% of the global population lives in areas where air quality exceeds WHO limits. Combustion engines generate nitrogen dioxide, a key component of both particulate matter and ozone, which create serious health risks and contribute significantly to climate change.

Joining initiatives to encourage staff to use bicycles to commute between home and work is an excellent way to raise awareness and reduce overall carbon emissions. For example, Bike to Work is organized by the Swiss NGO Pro Velo Switzerland. This event allows companies to register their staff to cycle between home and work during the months of May and June. Those who cycle at least half of their workdays are entered into a prize draw worth over CHF 120,000! It's a great initiative to encourage everyone to join in and cycle to work.





BEST TRANSPORTATION PRACTICES

Often, even short trips that could be made on foot or by bike are often made by car. As a society, we've grown accustomed to the convenience of car travel, preferring to arrive by car rather than walking in

in the rain or adjusting to the bus schedule. Taking public transportation, organizing a rideshare, walking, or cycling are alternative ways to get from home to work. Taking these alternatives is not

only beneficial for the environment, but also for your city. Fewer traffic jams, less noise, and cleaner air can make a huge difference in your day and that of others.

Additionally, consider the health benefits of daily exercise, even if it's just a walk from home or the office to the bus station. Those of us who work in an office spend most of the day sitting. Research has shown that this sedentary behavior increases a range of health risks, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and stroke. Walking or cycling to work every day can help counteract these problems and improve mental health by reducing the risk of depression. Plus, it saves a lot of money!

If you can't walk or bike, another option is to organize a carpool with your coworkers.

TRAVEL SMARTLY

Get active

1. Use public transportation.
2. Walk or bike to work: it's healthy and cost-effective! If you're worried about the transition, an e-bike can help you catch a break.
3. Carpool to work.
4. If your office allows it, consider telecommuting or staggering your arrival and departure times to avoid sitting in traffic and burning fuel during rush hour.
5. Plan ahead to make the most of your trips. For example, shopping and getting to an appointment on the same trip saves time and fuel.



EATING SUSTAINABLY

There are many ways to change the way we eat to improve our impact on the environment—and not just by going vegan! We can change the way we cook, what we shop for, where we dine, and how we access our ingredients to reduce our burden on the planet. Making these changes can be daunting at first, especially when many of us have established mealtime patterns, but making gradual changes step by step can make things easier and, hopefully, change our diet for the better.

One way to eat more sustainably is to choose seasonal or local produce. With global production and trade, most of us can access seemingly fresh fruits and vegetables at any time of the year and from halfway around the world.

However, this means that the produce has been shipped from far away, and a lot of energy has been

invested in storing, preserving, and transporting it to the local supermarket. Consuming local, seasonal produce has a much lower carbon footprint and is likely to be fresher and, overall, more nutritious, as it has been picked when truly ripe.

Another key method is to educate yourself about the impact of different types of food on the environment and to know what types of food we can access locally to have a lower impact on the planet. For example, many fish species are considered threatened by overfishing or are caught using destructive practices such as trawling. However, locally caught fish using sustainable methods can be acceptable for consumption.



TIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE EATING

Try something new

Prioritize plants: Fruits and vegetables are not only good for your health, but they have a much lower impact on the planet than meat, seafood, or dairy products.

Reduce or stop eating meat: You may be reluctant to completely eliminate it from your diet, but even giving up meat once or twice a week can have a big impact on the environment.

Plan your meals: Much of food waste or unsustainable eating choices are due to a lack of organization. Preparing meals at home instead of buying fast food can help you make ethical choices, rather than grabbing the quickest option when you're hungry.

Have some variety: Expanding your diet can be great to help diversify your stocks of agricultural foods. Three-quarters of the world's food supply comes from just 12 plant and five animal species, which is detrimental to biodiversity and food security (FAO, 1999). Trying new

types of products can help alleviate this situation and be a fun way to enjoy different foods.

Reduce waste: Sometimes this is easier said than done. Some tips to avoid food waste include: freezing food while it's fresh; buying loose items instead of packaged ones to control portions; using a shopping list to avoid buying items you don't need; storing food so it stays fresher longer; eating the oldest items first; sharing what you can't finish; and checking that food is safe to eat instead of relying solely on expiration dates.

Eat seasonal or local: Choosing seasonal and local products means choosing fresher foods with a smaller carbon footprint.

Choose sustainable seafood: Find out which fish and seafood are sustainable and ethical at your local stores. This may mean diversifying the types of seafood you normally consume, but it can go a long way



toward ensuring the sustainability of our oceans and marine biodiversity.

Grow your own food: If you have a garden or even a balcony, try growing some vegetables or fruit for yourself and your family—you'll be amazed at the difference in taste! Fresh, home-grown produce is not only carbon-neutral, but it's also pesticide-free and more nutritious and tasty because you eat it right when it's ripe.

Use all the food you can: Many people throw away perfectly edible parts of vegetables or meat when cooking, such as broccoli stems or the fat and skin. Being more open to eating parts of food you're not used to can help reduce waste. If you're particularly averse to eating certain parts of food, you can also turn these trimmings into broth or add them to compost.

Reduce takeout or food delivery: It's easy to pick up the phone and order a last-minute sandwich. But takeout and food delivery increase waste and pollution. It's fine for special occasions, but try not to make it a habit.



PURCHASE OF MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

Office purchases represent a large portion of global consumption. Large organizations can help minimize the environmental impact of their purchases by influencing supply through decisions made in purchasing practices. These changes can not only reduce demand for unsustainable products, but also help stimulate green products into the marketplace and motivate innovation and investment in green industries.

When we think about purchasing, it's not just how we use or waste products that impacts the environment. Many impacts occur before we even purchase a good or service, such as the harvesting or extraction of raw materials, design and development, manufacturing, transportation, storage, and packaging. Consuming sustainably and considering the entire lifecycle in a product's sustainability is vitally important, not only for individuals but also for organizations.

Incorporating sustainable purchasing practices is a good first step for organizations to show true leadership in greening the office environment. It is estimated that the emissions generated in the office supply chain are 5.5 times greater than those generated in the direct operations of an average company (CDP Supply Chain Report, 2019).

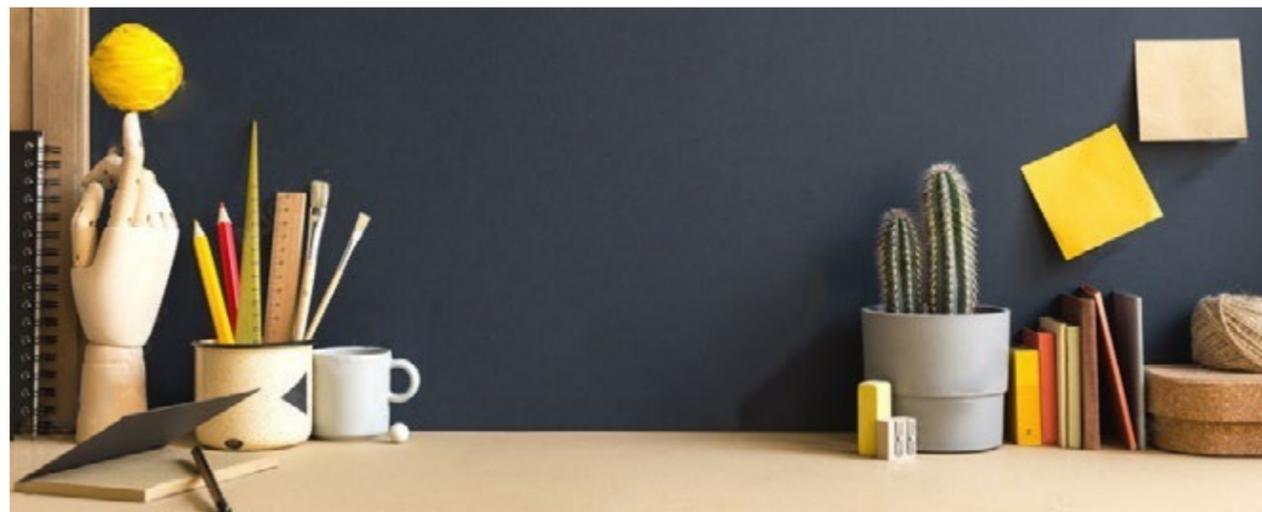
This represents a substantial impact that can go unnoticed in daily workplace operations. For example, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2012), it is estimated that more than 680,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions would be saved if all office products were Energy Star rated (a label that denotes energy efficiency).



SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

Sustainable or ethical procurement involves incorporating social, economic, and environmental considerations into procurement policy, in addition to the usual considerations of profitability and quality. It requires an organization to make decisions that meet both its own needs and those of society as a whole. Introducing these changes in policy and practice can be complex and, unlike other changes noted in this guide, may require leadership at the senior level. However, there are many resources to guide organizations seeking to improve their purchasing practices, and changes can be gradual, starting with small purchases before moving to larger and impactful ones. From a holistic perspective, sustainable purchasing involves identifying and

evaluating potential products or services using a lifecycle approach, integrating environmental and ethical considerations into purchasing assessments, managing unnecessary or inefficient consumption to reduce waste, and choosing suppliers who are conscious or proactive about the environmental impact of their activities. This requires an understanding of the supply chain. The environmental impacts of the production lifecycle are myriad and can involve a variety of risks, such as greenhouse gas emissions, waterway and ocean pollution, unnecessary waste creation, atmospheric pollution, the destruction of habitats or natural environments, or the reduction of biodiversity. These impacts must be weighed against costs, organizational needs, market



alternatives, etc.

There are many open source resources to help organizations begin designing a strategy to improve and change their purchasing practices, such as ISO 20400, a nonprofit organization that provides guidelines for organizations looking to integrate sustainable best practices into their purchasing. These resources not only consider processes, but also how practices should align with an organization's purpose and shift its

culture toward one that integrates sustainable thinking into all aspects of its work.



MAKE YOUR PROCESS GREEN

Start the conversation

Changes throughout the organization:

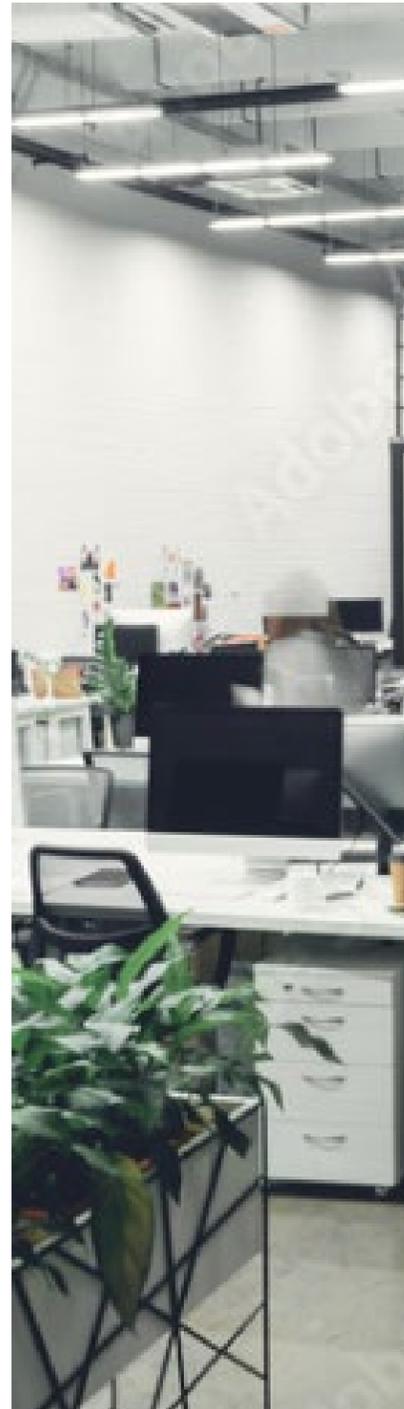
1. Examine your objectives. How do changes in the purchasing process fit in with other environmental changes planned for your organization? How can you integrate these changes with your organization's broader objectives?

2. Understand the bottom line. How much revenue does your organization spend on purchasing? Who are your suppliers? Are they committed to the environment?

3. Talk it over with the decision-makers. Decision-makers and senior managers need to understand the rationale for these changes and agree on the risks and opportunities they present.

Small-scale changes:

1. Research alternatives. Most purchasing practices focus on cost-effectiveness, but not all eco-friendly products or services are necessarily more expensive. Look for similarly priced eco-friendly alternatives that work within your current purchasing processes.



2. Review your office product usage. Are your office products necessary? Are they being wasted unnecessarily, or can they be replaced with a more sustainable or long-lasting product?

3. Look at the labels. Fair Trade certified or eco-labeled products can help you identify more ethical or sustainable alternatives to your current purchases.

4. Look at the life cycle. Not all products are clearly marked as the best option, but you can try to determine this by looking at the product's life cycle: Is it produced locally? Does it use biodegradable, organic, or recycled components? Is the supplier or producer concerned about the environmental impact?



CONCLUSION

The suggestions in this handbook are not intended to be exhaustive, but simply to offer an overview to help us begin to think about our choices and their relationship to the climate processes that affect our environment.

Not all of the suggestions offered may be relevant to everyone, but many will be easy changes to make in daily routines as long as we are willing to make environmental factors part of our decision-making. These changes don't have to be made alone: encourage and collaborate with your colleagues to make these changes easy and fun instead of a chore.

The Permanent Mission of Mexico to the United Nations Office in Geneva is committed to acting as a leader and advocate in the fight against climate change. The changes we adopt will be part of the work carried out as part of our responsibility to ensure we act in a way that guarantees the sustainability of the planet for future generations.

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