

## Introduction

# Moving towards a cleaner, greener

Climate change is a growing concern for us all, and it is fast becoming clear that unless we play our part in adopting more environmentally friendly practices in our everyday life then our planet will suffer.

Environmental experts tell us that by burning fossil fuels such as oil, coal or gas at the current worldwide rate, either directly or through electricity use, we are releasing too much carbon dioxide.

Carbon dioxide and other “greenhouse gases” like methane, collect in the earth’s atmosphere, trapping the sun’s heat. We are seeing more extreme weather as a result – heat waves, drought, cyclones etc.

There is much scientific evidence to suggest that we now have about 10 years to stop rising carbon dioxide emissions. Otherwise we run the risk of devastating “runaway” climate change, accelerated by harm to ice, seas and forests that absorb and reflect much of our carbon dioxide.

Employers, employees, unions, communities and governments all have a role to play to fix this problem. Energy conservation and efficiency, recycling and smarter use of our consumable products are just a few areas that can, and will, make a difference to the survival of our planet.

Many people don’t realise that operating office equipment can cost much more than the initial outlay for the equipment. For example, a photocopier that costs \$4000 to buy, and that is left on continuously for seven years over its “two-million copies” lifespan, may consume \$1500 worth of electricity, \$24,000 of paper and \$15,000 of toner.

The greenhouse gas emissions from supplying energy from power stations and manufacturing and disposing of the paper could exceed 80 tonnes of carbon dioxide, which is equivalent to more than the total greenhouse gas emissions of a typical Australian home over that seven-year period.

Increasingly, leading-edge organisations are considering operating costs as well as environmental impacts when they buy their office equipment. For example, they understand that if you buy an energy-efficient photocopier designed to work well with recycled paper and refilled toner cartridges, copy double-sided whenever you can, set up an effective paper recycling system, and set the photocopier to powersave when you’re not using it, over its seven-year life you may:

- Reduce electricity you use by up to 80 per cent
- Save up to 80 per cent on your electricity bill
- Halve your paper and toner bills
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from electricity, paper and toner by 75 per cent
- Leave 50 trees in the ground, which would otherwise have been chopped down to make paper
- Involve staff at all levels in doing something for the environment
- Increase productivity through improved staff morale
- Enhance company profits.

Much of this change can occur in the workplace, and, with this in mind, the ASU has produced this guide to assist union members in shaping workplace policies and debates on environmental matters.



## NEED FOR CHANGE

There are some very good reasons for making your office an energy-efficient, environmentally friendly workplace. Firstly, buying and using energy-efficient equipment saves your company money. It can provide enormous savings in electricity use alone, saving you up to \$180 per 1,000 kilowatt-hours of energy and cutting up to 80 per cent off your organisation's electricity bill. It can also cut 20–30 per cent off your air-conditioning bill because you are reducing the amount of heat that your equipment generates and that needs to be cooled. Paper costs can be almost halved simply by printing double-sided, and you can save \$100 on toner and \$30 on ink by refilling your printer and toner cartridges. You also save on waste disposal costs because the amount of waste you generate is reduced.

Secondly, the environmental benefits of using energy-efficient equipment are tremendous. By reducing the electricity your company uses you are reducing air and water pollution from power stations and saving a tonne of greenhouse gas for each 1,000 kilowatt-hour of electricity you save.

Refilling, reusing and recycling the materials you use reduces the amount of waste and pollution you generate. In addition, making equipment from recycled metals, plastics and other materials saves at least two kilograms of greenhouse gas per kilogram of product. Using recycled paper saves trees. Every 100 reams of recycled office paper that is printed double-sided saves two trees, more than a tonne of greenhouse gas and almost a cubic metre of landfill space com-

pared to 100 reams of paper that is not recycled or printed double-sided.

Thirdly, making your office a "green" one will involve staff at all levels in your organisation in doing something for the environment.

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Knowing that their actions can really make a difference will enhance a natural motivation to act in an environmentally responsible way. Since motivated staff are productive staff, an organisation will see an increase in productivity. Since most office-based workplaces spend about 100 times as much on wages as they do on energy, small increases in staff productivity can have major impacts on profitability and your company's bottom line.

## THE ASU'S ROLE

The ASU Victorian Private Sector Branch represents people working on the front-line in customer service, call centre, office, clerical and administration roles. Working in either the private or community sector, they are employed by companies such as Qantas, Foxtel and Target and organisations such as Oxfam, the RSPCA and Australian Conservation Foundation. Our members may be working full-time, part-time or in temporary

positions. We work alongside our members to advance their terms of employment and working conditions, giving them a stronger voice in the workplace and wider community. Our role, which is undertaken through industrial, social and political campaigns, is critical in supporting and defending the working interests of our members.

Part of this support extends to matters of widespread importance such as the environment and our planet. With the climate change message

finally starting to filter through from governments to employers to everyday people and their families, the ASU encourages all of its members and their employers to take greater personal responsibility for behaviours and actions that can have a negative impact on the environment. When it comes to the workplace, the ASU believes that, in many cases, a more pro-active approach is required by employers, in particular, to encourage sustainable and environmentally friendly working practices.

The information contained in this Clean & Green Office Guide is far from definitive, but it may be helpful to members who wish to take the first steps towards a more sustainable workplace.

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