

Helpful Tips: What You Should Know about Buying Green Furniture

What constitutes an environmental product? Recycled content matters but so do a variety of other attributes such as how a product is made, packaged, and shipped. The following are key factors to consider when making your next green furniture purchase.

Built To Last

Durability is the foremost green criterion for office furniture purchases. What to look for? The best warranty you can find. There is no better indication of a product's durability than the manufacturer's confidence in it.

A word of caution: Beware of lifetime warranties that include conditions and qualifiers. A straightforward lifetime warranty that covers multi-shift usage and does not include exclusions is preferable.

Easy To Change and Reconfigure

Rule of thumb: If it is *not* easy to reconfigure and reuse, it is probably not worth considering. Modular systems furniture provides environmental responsibility in the workplace. In the past, when an office had to be reconfigured, it meant demolishing fixed walls and filling up landfills with waste.

Cradle To Cradle

Since the onset of the Industrial Revolution, most manufacturers have assumed a cradle-to-grave life cycle that is, you use a product until it wears out and then bury it. Instead, today's progressive manufacturers are working toward a cradle-to-cradle approach, which assumes that a product eventually will be recycled rather than disposed of.

Cradle-to-cradle manufacturers develop products that are easy to take apart, easy to recycle, and generally easy on the environment even to the point of evaluating the chemical makeup of raw materials to be sure they are earth friendly.

A Breath Of Fresh Air

Have you noticed how new cars, new construction, and new furniture all have a distinctive odor? That odor indicates harmful contaminants are evaporating into the air. Many government workplaces are subject to stringent regulations pertaining to the emission of these volatile organic compounds, or VOCs.

To help protect your employees, choose low-emitting office furniture that meets standards set forth by either the independent Greenguard Environmental Institute or the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association.

Recycled At the Beginning

Many furniture makers reveal the percentage of recycled content in their products, so it is relatively easy to narrow your choices in this regard. You may even see a breakdown comparing post-consumer to pre-consumer recycled content. Post-consumer is preferable because it encompasses materials that have completed their life cycle in the consumer market and otherwise would be discarded plastic bottles, for instance. Pre-consumer materials consist largely of manufacturing scrap that was never used in the consumer market.

Recyclable At The End

Is the furniture you purchased recyclable at the end of its useful life? To answer this question, you will want to learn how the piece of furniture is put together and how easy it is to take apart. If it is difficult to disassemble, its components will probably not be recyclable.

Let It Shine

Can your choice of office furniture reduce your electric bill? Absolutely. Consider glass tiles, translucent screens, low-height panels anything that lets light reach interior spaces. The more daylight your workplace gets, the less artificial light it needs and the happier your employees will be.

Wrap It Up

Bulky packaging can sideswipe the best intentions if it ends up in a landfill. Stay green by requesting returnable packaging (like shipping blankets) or recyclable alternatives corrugated cardboard and polystyrene foam.

Meet The Maker

Consider how the furniture supplier you are evaluating does business, not just how they make products. Does the company still sound green after articulating its policies toward renewable energy, solid-waste recycling, water conservation, and air emissions? Also, are any of its facilities LEED-certified by the *U.S. Green Building Council*? The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program promotes green construction practices and awards buildings that make the grade.

Given stricter environmental criteria, government buyers are examining the green characteristics of furniture from a broader perspective than ever before. Fortunately, the industry is ready with environmental practices that stand up to scrutiny.

For more information about environmentally responsible purchasing, visit [USCommunities](http://www.gogreencommunities.org/) (<http://www.gogreencommunities.org/>).