



Paper footprint reduction

How-to
guide



LIVING PLANET
@WORK



Paper footprint reduction

Learn how to move your company forward in reducing its paper footprint.

About this guide

The Living Planet @ Work paper reduction guide will provide your company with tips to help you on your sustainability journey. Read below to learn more about the four steps involved, including:

Step 1: Measuring your workplace's paper footprint

Step 2: Setting paper sourcing and reduction targets

Step 3: Taking actions to reduce paper impact

Step 4: Tracking and reporting

Before getting started

Create a project team to focus on reducing your paper footprint. Reach out to individuals at your organization and ask if they can join your project team or support you in this initiative. Good places to start outreach are with your green team, corporate social responsibility (CSR) department, HR department and your manager.

If you do not have a green team, learn how to start one [here](#).

TIP: Get senior-leader support

*Try to engage a senior leader early in the process by asking them to be an executive sponsor of your green team or project team. Highlighting the business benefits of improving sustainability practices at your organization can be a good way to get them on board. Visit the **Sustainability Advantage website** for more information on how to present the business case to a senior leader.*



Step 1: Measure your paper footprint

Implementing a paper footprint reduction strategy can help your organization identify sustainability gaps, reduce costs and reduce the need for natural resources. If your organization does not currently measure how much paper it uses, focus on this as your first step.

To begin measuring your paper footprint, answer the following questions:

What is your scope?

Paper use at your company isn't just about office paper. It also includes:

- packaging
- office supplies (envelopes, sticky notes, stationery, notebooks)
- tissues, napkins, and toilet paper
- paper plates and other paper-based containers

What aspects of your company's paper use will you focus on measuring? Be realistic about your task by starting with small wins and expanding from there.



Image credit: HP Canada

TIP: Just starting your journey?

You may want to start small. Consider focusing on one aspect of your company's paper use such as office paper consumed in your HQ building or by your department. Create small wins and expand from there.



What are your key performance indicators?

Key performance indicators (KPIs) help your company set a baseline so you can compare sustainability performance against your targets. Work with your green team to determine which KPIs you will be using to measure your office's paper impacts. Two examples include:

a. Total paper consumed. You can calculate this by finding out how much paper was purchased over the past year. Office paper is typically purchased in packages called “reams” which is equivalent to 500 sheets of paper. This [simple calculator](#) will help you measure the environmental impacts of paper consumption.

b. The proportion of paper with environmental attributes. This is also done by tracking all the paper that is purchased in one year and determining how much of that paper contains environmental attributes. Common environmental attributes include:

- [Forest Stewardship Council \(FSC\)](#) certification
- EcoLogo certification
- Paper that contains recycled (or post-consumer) content

How will you collect the data?

What actions will your company take to collect the information you need? It may be helpful to develop a checklist of ‘to do’ items and deadlines to keep you on track.

TIP:

*The **Environmental Paper Network** contains many different resources, tools and tips to help your company reduce its paper footprint.*

Step 1 checklist summary:

Before moving ahead to step 2, we recommend that you:

- ✓ Get support from your green team, CSR team, a senior leader or other colleagues as necessary
- ✓ Determine your project scope
- ✓ Determine key performance indicators
- ✓ Create an action plan for data collection
- ✓ Collect paper data



Step 2: Set paper footprint reduction targets

Once you have completed measuring your company's paper use, think about how to use the results to set targets for reduction. Get started by identifying opportunities for early wins but keep more ambitious opportunities in mind as well. The following figures are examples of targets that you can adopt for your workplace:

- Purchase 30% of office paper that contains at least 30% post-consumer recycled content and is FSC-certified
- Purchase 50% FSC-certified office paper
- Reduce total paper consumption by 25% over previous year
- Reduce total paper consumption by 50% over 3 years
- Increase to 30% the proportion of paper purchased that contains at least 30% recycled content
- Increase to 30% the proportion of paper purchased that meets sustainability criteria, such as FSC or EcoLogo certification

Note: Sustainability targets vary by company and are created based on many different factors such as company size, industry performance, most significant environmental impacts and/or its largest business risks and opportunities.

This list provides examples of what your targets could look like, but it will be up to your company to determine what its actual targets will be.

What is FSC?

The Forest Stewardship Council is an international, non-profit organization that supports environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. To date, more than 55.2 million hectares of FSC-certified forests exist in Canada.¹



Image credit: HP Canada

¹ Source: FSC (2018)



WWF recommends using one of the several of the following types of paper (in order of preference) for publications, office paper and recycled tissue paper:



FSC certified
recycled paper

100% post – consumer recycled
(non-FSC labelled) paper



FSC certified
100% virgin paper



FSC Mixed Sources
(certified virgin, recycled and
controlled sources)

TIP:
Do you know what your competitors are doing?

Do some research and benchmark your performance based on what other organizations in your industry are doing. This may help you get an idea of appropriate sector-based targets to strive for or beat.

Step 2 checklist summary:

Before moving on to step 3, we recommend that you:

- ✓ Work with your team to establish short and long-term paper reduction and sourcing targets
- ✓ Research what your competitors are doing to see whether the targets you set are appropriate. Revise as necessary



Step 3: Take paper footprint reduction actions

Select the footprint reduction actions you would like to take at your company. The list below provides examples of paper reduction and employee engagement tips. We suggest pairing the two together to maximize effectiveness.

Beginner actions:

- **Use two-way envelopes** to save on costs associated with paper, inventory, warehousing, handling, printing and labelling. Print directly on envelopes instead of using labels.
- **Post in-house reminders** near copy machines or individual desktops. Use catchy slogans like “Do you really need to print that?” or “Do you know how many sheets of paper you used last month?”
- **Transfer documents by e-mail or using a cloud-based transfer service** when reviewing larger documents.
- **Provide clearly labelled recycling bins** near copiers, shipping and receiving areas, and in employee eating areas to collect white paper, mixed paper, newspaper, magazines, cardboard as well as non-paper products (glass, aluminum, plastic, etc).²
- **Reduce image size when printing or copying.** The ability to reduce or enlarge images is common on copiers and printers.
- **Use the blank sides of unneeded single-sided copies** for printing drafts.²
- **Let your copier maintenance person know when a copier is performing poorly** (toner is low, jams frequently, etc.). Regular copier maintenance is important, especially if the toner is low. Many times copiers are used until all the toner is gone and that wears down machines. A copier that works well is less likely to jam and this helps save paper!²
- **Set defaults to double sided.** Select one-sided printing only when really needed.²
- **Make “rethink” or “are you sure” messages appear on screen** when a print command is given.
- **Conduct a print responsibly challenge** to encourage employees to embark on a friendly competition to minimize their impact from printing. Consider hosting these challenges on key dates like Earth Day, Earth Hour or World Environment Day.
- **Recognize a “Paper Saving Champion” of the month** – for whoever showcases significant print footprint reduction.
- **Host a lunch n’ learn or movie screening** to raise awareness about key environmental issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss.

² Source: WWF



Intermediate actions:

- **Think about internal information management.** Your company can save paper and money by centralizing files, reducing distribution lists and consolidating forms.
- **Use electronic means** for your marketing and communications efforts where possible.
- **Avoid purchasing paper that has features which make it difficult to recycle.** This includes: thermal fax paper, glossy/plastic coatings, plastic windows, bright colours including goldenrod, laser printer inks and adhesive products. This often makes the paper non-recyclable.
- **Keep copiers and printers in good repair** and make it your company's policy to only buy copiers and printers that make reliable double-sided copies.
- **Undergo an inventory** to identify past printing jobs for which too many copies were ordered. This will help ensure that the quantity ordered matches demand for printing jobs in the future.
- **Create systems that allow staff to measure how many print copies they are personally responsible for each month.** Most people are shocked to find out how much they consume. This knowledge will motivate people to reduce their personal paper footprint.
- **Employ office Intranet solutions** that allow open or password-protected access to important documents, presentations, or databases.
- **Use electronic data interchange (EDI) technologies,** like web-based secure credit card transfers and order forms, to reduce the need for cumbersome paper invoices, transaction records and confirmation letters.
- **Create a checklist for departments which order or print paper-based materials in large quantities** to encourage them to think about how much printed materials they actually need.
- **Purchase paper products, including envelopes and business cards, with an environmental certification** such as FSC or EcoLogo (e.g. EarthChoice paper). For steps on how to get buy-in from your procurement team, visit our [sustainable procurement toolkit](#).
- **Incorporate environmental education** into your new employee integration program.
- **Put out a suggestion box** for employees to ask them for their thoughts and ideas – but make sure you are prepared to recognize and implement these efforts. Consider giving a prize to employees that suggest ideas that get implemented.



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Advanced actions:

- **Develop and implement policies** that will help you make decisions to reduce paper use across the organization.
- **Set science-based targets** to align your company’s goals with the SBT initiative.
- **Seek opportunities to green your supply chain** through sustainable procurement. Break down the silos between procurement and sustainability using our toolkit [here](#).
- **Align your paper-related goals to the UN Sustainable Development Goals** and determine how your targets will ladder up to helping achieve some of the 17 SDGs.
- **Create an organization-wide sustainability communications strategy for employees** to educate them about the steps your company is taking to reduce paper use and responsibly source paper to meet its broader goals and objectives.

TIP:

Draft an action plan to help organize your tasks, responsibilities and deadlines, and how these actions ladder up to your existing targets (see below).

Sample action plan template

Action 1:

Tasks	Person responsible	Deadline

Action 2:

Tasks	Person responsible	Deadline



TIP:

If one or more of your sustainability actions requires support from other individuals or departments, it is important that you speak with them before finalizing your action plan. For example, if your plan requires working with the finance department to review office supply costs, have a conversation with them before moving forward to determine if there are any challenges. If your proposed action is not currently possible, work together to find a different solution.

Step 3 checklist summary:

Before moving on to step 4, we recommend that you:

- ✓ Select actions from the list that you would like to implement at your company
- ✓ Create a plan to organize your actions into tasks, responsibilities and deadlines
- ✓ Get buy-in from appropriate individuals/ departments on the action plan
- ✓ Present revised action plan to senior leadership if applicable



Image credit: © Ashley Cooper / WWF



Step 4: Track and report

Track your efforts

Just as organizations continually collect data around their financial performance, it is important to regularly track progress on sustainability by recollecting data about your KPIs. Measuring on a periodic basis can help determine if you're on track to meet your goals or if adjustments are needed.

At the end of the tracking period, look at your results with an analytical lens. Did they turn out as you expected? Why, or why not? Identify challenges and opportunities for inclusion in next year's sustainability efforts.

TIP:

Getting stuck? *Examine what might be stopping you from making progress and what actions you can take to overcome the barriers. If necessary, adjust your target to reflect a more realistic outcome.*

Meeting your targets early? *Great news! Now try setting more ambitious targets.*

Report on sustainability

We are entering an era where corporate social responsibility and business transparency is of critical importance to stakeholders. That's why it's important to report on your progress to employees, customers, investors, vendors, partners and other key groups that can influence the success of your organization.

Regardless of how big or small your company is or whether you share this information publicly or privately, reporting on sustainability will help you better understand your company's environmental footprint, identify opportunities to adopt more sustainable practices and communicate your environmental efforts.



Image credit: HP Canada



Just getting started? It's okay to start small

For companies just starting to measure, track, and set targets for environmental performance, trying to develop and publish a full sustainability report in the first year may not be the best option. In the long term, it is often much easier and more effective to start small and build your way up to a full sustainability report. Starting small could mean:

- Preparing a small report, presentation, brochure or blog for employees only and sharing the information via e-mail, intranet or by placing a document in common areas of the office.
- Putting statistics and information on your company website instead of preparing a fully-designed sustainability report.
- Including a section on sustainability in your company's annual report.
- Focusing on just a few sustainability metrics to start.
- Thinking about how to present your information through design such as using quantitative data, tables, graphs and illustrations, where applicable.

The important thing is to start sharing your reporting initiatives, regardless of how small they may seem.

Already have a sustainability report?

If your company already has a sustainability report, check to see whether it follows the Global Reporting Initiative's standards. The Global

Reporting Initiative is an international organization that provides guidance around best practices for communicating progress on sustainability efforts. Visit [The GRI website](#) for details. 

Moving forward

Taking action for the environment is an ongoing and cyclical process. Once you have completed these four steps, you have an opportunity to restart the process to better your environmental performance each year. Measure new things, expand your scope, set new targets. The more progress you make, the more impact you'll have for your company and the planet.

Step 4 checklist summary:

To complete step 4, we recommend you:

- ✓ Create a process for tracking paper KPIs periodically throughout the year
- ✓ Determine what information you would like to report on
- ✓ Determine your intended audience and how you would like to report on that information
- ✓ Create a reporting action plan by identifying the tasks that need to be completed for reporting



Additional Resources:

Employee engagement

- [How to start a green team:](#)
Living Planet @ Work

Office paper footprint reduction

- [Sustainable procurement toolkit:](#)
Living Planet @ Work
- [Tips to save paper:](#) WWF
- [Check your paper:](#) WWF
- [6 Steps to Responsible Paper Purchasing:](#)
WWF
- [Environmental Paper Company Index 2017:](#)
WWF
- [Paper saving case studies:](#)
Environmental Paper Network

Sustainability reporting

- [About sustainability reporting:](#)
Global Reporting Initiative
- [Sustainability reporting resource library:](#)
Global Reporting Initiative

Advanced goal setting

- [Science based targets:](#) Science Based Targets
- [Sustainable Development Goals:](#)
United Nations