

Cedar Tree Foundation – Environmental Practices in our Work Place

last updated – August 2011

Because the Cedar Tree Foundation supports and promotes environmental protection and health, we strive to implement best possible environmental practices in our work place. While we continually look for new ideas and areas of improvement, here is what we've done so far:

Office structure

In April of 2007, Cedar Tree moved into a newly rented office space in a 19th century office building located in downtown Boston. We worked to incorporate environmental improvements during the renovation of the space prior to taking occupancy.

Carpeting-Commercial carpet can be a significant environmental health hazard. Carpet backing, which holds the fibers together, and the adhesive used to stick carpet to the floor, have both been linked to sources of indoor air pollution. New carpets emit hazardous chemicals into the air (off-gas), and these chemicals can cause health issues from headaches to more serious neurological problems. Our new carpet is certified green with the commercial carpet industry's first fully sustainable, cradle to cradle carpet backing. The carpet contains 25% recycled materials and when we are done with it, the company will take it back and recycle it into their new carpets. The adhesive is non-toxic and low-emissions certified.

Office runners are made of 100% sisal, an environmentally friendly alternative to synthetic fibers. Sisal, a plant member of the agave family, is known for its resiliency and is widely cultivated without the use of pesticides or harmful fertilizers. Fibers are extracted in a natural, non-chemical process and can be used in a variety of ways, ensuring little waste. Unused material and byproducts are completely biodegradable.

Paint-Paint is another source of indoor air pollution, which can contain a high level of Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). VOCs are linked to upper respiratory irritation, headaches and nausea. We used an environmental paint called Eco-Spec, which is low in VOC's, nontoxic, and latex based. It was remarkable for having none of that "new paint" smell.

Vinyl Reduction-We asked the building management to try to limit the use of vinyl in our new office. The production and disposal of vinyl is a high-polluting health hazard. Instead of vinyl baseboards and kitchen flooring, we requested rubber base-boards and kitchen linoleum (a more sustainable, environmental flooring alternative).

Energy Consumption-Each individual office has its own heat pump for heating and cooling. This allows us to better control our energy use, saving energy on more temperate days and turning cooling/heating off when staff people are out of town. In addition, offices are fitted with motion detector light switches that also give staff the option of turning on half the overhead lights on brighter days.

Kitchen-The addition of a kitchen to our office space allows employees to bring and/or cook lunch in the office, using silverware and dishes that can be washed here. This reduces our dependence on highly processed lunch items, carry out containers, and disposable utensils and plates. The kitchen also enables staff to cook and eat together and we can better support catering in the adjoining conference room.

As an alternative to Styrofoam or paper cups, staff members and guests are provided with ceramic mugs to cut down on office waste. In addition, Brita water filters and an office carbonation system are kept on hand to reduce the number of plastic bottles generated by the staff.

Recycling- Cedar Tree's building-wide, single-stream recycling program is overseen by Mass Hauling / CPR, a processing facility based in Weymouth, MA.

Furniture-We purchased the main reception unit from Teknion, a company that uses recycled raw materials in its production. The reception unit was constructed of 53% recycled material and is green guard certified for low amounts of formaldehyde, TVOC, aldehydes and 4-phrnlcyclohexene.

We are continuing to explore product options with this company or one with similar environmental/sustainable policies for future furniture purchases.

Office Supplies

Water- Due to the results of staff research that indicate bottled water may be no healthier than tap water, and may actually be even more contaminated (unless marked as distilled), we have discontinued our practice of purchasing bottled water. Any negative health impact on the employees is assumed to be nonexistent and we are no longer demanding (through our purchase practice) the creation and transport of plastic bottles.

Plastic- The recycling of plastic waste is facilitated by the building's management company.

Paper- The production of recycled paper uses less energy and contributes less water and air pollution than the process of using fresh lumber to produce paper. In addition, the practice of continually harvesting trees leads to nutrient erosion in the soil, which is often offset by the use of chemical fertilizers. Paper purchased for Cedar Tree office use (including office stationary) is 100 % post consumer waste recycled. Office stationary uses soy ink and is produced at a unionized, worker owned printing company. In addition, we use an intranet server that allows staff to access documents via the network without having to print separate copies of shared documents and increases access for staff to work remotely to reduce travel impact. We encourage potential grantees to submit letters of inquiry via email instead of regular mail and are currently working on converting as much of the grant proposal process as possible into an electronic format.

Outsourced printing is completed by Red Sun Press, a printing and design union shop that shares Cedar Tree's strong commitment to the environment. Red Sun uses a variety of recycled papers with high post-consumer waste content and vegetable based inks in place of traditional oil based options. In 2000, Red Sun received the Commonwealth of Massachusetts "Buy Recycled and Environmentally Preferred Products" Business award for their pioneering role in recycled paper printing.

Staff members at the Cedar Tree Foundation take a conservative approach to in house printing, often taking advantage of the designated printer stocked with scrap paper or printing double sided whenever possible. All empty ink and toner cartridges are returned to the manufacturer for recycling. In addition, Cedar Tree enlists the services of the collection company, Earthworm, to process all recyclable paper waste.

Binders and Folders- Standard 3 rings binders used in an office setting are usually vinyl, a plastic material that contains harmful phthalates. Cedar Tree has chosen to replace these non-biodegradable products with Sustainable Group's recycled binders. This product contains a minimum of 35% post consumer recycled material and is 100% recyclable. These binders are assembled with a reusable screw and t-nut ring making it easy to replace old covers. In addition to using this Sustainable Group product, Cedar Tree stocks their recycled pocket folders, dividers, and cd/dvd cases. File folders are produced from 100% Post-Consumer content

Cleaning Products-Traditional household/office cleaning products often contain chemicals that have been linked to a range of conditions including cancer, asthma, allergies, hormone disruption, and reproductive and developmental disorders. At Cedar Tree, we only purchase non-toxic cleaning products for office use.

Transportation

Commuting-To encourage the use of public transportation, we have a commuter program available to staff that allows them to put money aside on a pretax basis for commuting expenses. This program also provides extra convenience by delivering monthly train/bus passes to employees' home addresses.

Foundation Funds

Wainwright Bank- The Foundation's primary banking relationship is with a Boston based community bank which has a stated commitment to a social justice platform. Nearly 50% of Wainwright Bank's loan portfolio is focused on affordable housing and community development projects. In addition to several other social justice initiatives, Wainwright also has programs focused on environmental protection such as their green loan product and LEED certification at its two newest branches.

Mission Related Investing-We view our investments as an integrated component of our mission and believe that we need to add social value to the management of the investment portfolio and reduce the dissonance between the philanthropic mission of the Foundation and the management of its assets.

In June 2008, Cedar Tree hired RBC's Socially Responsible Investing Wealth Management Group to serve as an overall investment consultant.

The RBC team brings the capability to completely customize the foundation's investment portfolio to fit its MRI policy and approach doing so with the philosophy that they will provide competitive market returns. RBC (Royal Bank of Canada) is also a leader in corporate commitment to issues of sustainability and diversity.

For the Future

The Cedar Tree Foundation will continue to enact and incorporate the values and philosophy that shape our grant making into all our activities. We continually test new ideas to reduce our environmental footprint; and we are encouraged by the fact that the changes detailed above have improved the quality of office life while, for the most part, costing the same or less than conventional choices.