



Green Office Guide

University of Rochester Sustainability Office

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INTRODUCTION

In an ongoing effort to optimize energy consumption, reduce the University's carbon footprint, and lower costs associated with utilities, waste management, and disposal, the Green Office Guide was created to help offices throughout the University become more responsible and sustainable with regard to resource use. In 2025, the university was recognized for its efforts in sustainability and was named a [STARS Silver Institution by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education \(AASHE\)](#). The Sustainability Office aims to keep improving sustainability at the University and establishing more widespread sustainability initiatives across the institution.

The following guidelines will assist you and your office in embracing the [R5 zero waste hierarchy](#)—Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rochester—in every aspect of your daily work life. By rethinking and reducing your initial resource consumption, reusing non-depleted resources, and correctly recycling appropriate material(s), you will ultimately help propel the University and its community towards being more sustainable.

ENERGY

Electricity is a key component of any office setting and is used to power everything from internet servers to coffee machines. It is also one of the most wasted resources within offices due to the number of appliances dependent on electrical power to function. However, many simple changes can make your office more energy-efficient and cost-friendly.

You can see your location's energy use data over time using the [River Campus Energy Dashboard](#) or [Medical Center Energy Dashboard](#). For questions about energy for all University of Rochester buildings, you can [contact the Energy Services team](#).

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- **Uses smart power strips and/or unplugs devices when not in use in order to reduce phantom loads.**
 - The term “phantom load” describes any power that is used by an electrical appliance/device after it has been switched off or put into sleep mode. Although the electricity used per device/appliance may be negligible, the combined load of all office appliances becomes significant.
 - Smart power strips are those that automatically detect devices in standby mode and cut the flow of power to these devices.
 - If you use power strips in your office, make sure that they are “UL listed” as these adhere to the [University's Fire Safety Code](#).
 - Do not “daisy-chain” power strips (i.e., connect a power strip to another power strip).

- Makes use of natural lighting instead of light bulbs where possible.**
 - Natural lighting is known to be [better for your health, both physically and mentally](#). An added advantage: it's free!
 - Be more productive and sustainable by opting for natural lighting whenever possible, and in turn, reduce or even eliminate artificial light in certain areas.
 - Consider the season. In the winter, keep blinds open to allow the room to be naturally heated by the sun. In the warmer months, balance the need for natural light with the benefits of using blinds to reduce cooling needs.
- Uses hand dryers instead of paper towels where possible.**
 - All hand dryers installed in University restrooms are energy efficient, less expensive to operate over time, and are [more environmentally friendly than paper towels](#). Given the option to choose between the two, always opt for hand dryers.
 - If your restroom is missing a hand dryer, you can contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 or submit an [online work request](#) to request one.
- Has eliminated unnecessary electronic appliances and devices.**
 - Contact your Department Administrator to report any unnecessary electronic office appliances/devices. Fill out this [form](#) to request a pickup of departmental electronic equipment for recycling. Some examples could be unused fax machines, old computers/laptops, outdated equipment, etc.
 - For any working appliances or non-data-storing devices that did *not* come from University IT, contact other departments to see if they are in need of these items for reuse.
- Has occupancy sensors installed in restrooms, common areas, and office spaces**
 - Occupancy sensors automatically turn lights on when you enter a space and off when you leave; this is an efficient and cost-effective way of saving electricity.
 - Contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 if you would like occupancy sensors to be installed in your office area, or submit an [online work request](#).
- Program occupancy sensors to turn down HVAC system when rooms are unoccupied**
 - If occupancy sensors for lights are present in your workplace, they can also be programmed to adjust the temperature when the space is unoccupied. This saves much more energy than turning off the lights.
 - This often requires a capital project. Talk with the departmental or building manager to discuss this possibility.
- Ensure the HVAC schedule is in line with building use**
 - Often, the HVAC schedule is set to run 24/7 or 18 hours per day, when this may not be necessary.
 - Energy Services can set the schedule to only run when needed. However, they require the data on occupant use. Determine when the HVAC needs to run based on the area's occupancy and [share that schedule with Energy Services](#) to have it implemented. If the entire university did this, it is estimated that total energy consumption would be reduced by 10-20%.
- Switches off lights when leaving a room for more than 15 minutes and at the end of the day**
 - A sure way to save energy is to manually switch off the lights whenever leaving a room for extended periods of time, even if you have occupancy sensors installed.

- Check with your building coordinator and/or Environmental Services lead to confirm that lights are being shut off during nighttime hours.
 - Uses overhead or personal fans instead of air conditioning where possible**
 - Overhead fans and Energy Star-certified personal fans use less energy than conventional air conditioning (AC) units. Where possible, opt for fans instead of air conditioning.
 - Has optimized thermostats as per University temperature setback recommendations**
 - AC units are the most energy-intensive appliances in most office settings. It is recommended that you set your thermostats to a max of 68°F during winter and a min of 76°F during the summer (except in patient care areas).
 - For any thermostat servicing and calibration requests, contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 or submit an [online work request](#).
 - Keeps all windows closed in air-conditioned buildings**
 - For AC units to work optimally, air must circulate within a relatively contained space. Open windows allow for conditioned air to escape and unconditioned outdoor air to enter. This, in turn, forces AC units to work more to maintain the desired air temperature which uses more electricity. Keeping windows closed facilitates the even distribution of conditioned air and allows for the maintenance of a constant room temperature.
 - Has sleep settings turned on for all computers, printers, and copying equipment**
 - Electrical appliances use significantly less energy when they are in sleep mode than when they are in active mode. As a general rule, set displays/monitors to switch off after 10 minutes of inactivity, hard disks after 30 minutes of inactivity, and full system sleep after 60 minutes of inactivity, with a password required upon wakeup.
 - Select the power-saving option on your printers and copiers when available. Consult your Department Administrator to find out if you have office-specific guidelines with regard to energy saving and computer system settings.
 - Only uses energy-efficient Light Emitting Diode (LED) or fluorescent light bulbs**
 - LEDs and energy-efficient fluorescent lightbulbs can use up to 70% less energy than conventional incandescent lightbulbs, whilst achieving the same lighting effect. To have your lightbulbs changed or replaced, contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 or submit an [online work request](#).
 - Uses energy-saving appliances and electronics that are Energy Star or EPEAT certified**
 - Energy Star certified products are more energy efficient and are designed to use significantly less electricity than non-certified products. Similarly, EPEAT certified electronics are designed to meet a rigorous list of standards, which ultimately reduces a product's environmental impact from manufacture to end of life. Find more information about these certification processes by visiting the [Energy Star](#) and [EPEAT](#) websites.
 - Sends emails with an energy-saving checklist to staff before all breaks and holidays**
 - See the University's [Holiday Saving Checklist](#).
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COMPUTING & PRINTING

Apart from electricity, paper tends to be one of the most wasted office resources. By following the guidelines listed below, your office will not only be able to be more sustainable with regard to paper use, but will also be able to save money on unnecessary costs associated with replenishing paper and printing supplies.

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT

- Has set double-sided printing and copying as the default setting on all printers and copiers**
 - Consult your Department Administrator to find out if these settings are the default within your office, or use the University IT's [live chat support](#) to talk to an IT Specialist about how to apply such settings as the default on your device.
 - Uses postconsumer recycled paper of at least 30% for all office use**
 - Postconsumer recycled paper uses less virgin material to manufacture and is therefore more environmentally friendly than non-postconsumer recycled paper. Consult your Department Administrator to find out the type of paper your office orders.
 - Avoids color printing as much as possible**
 - Toner ink for color printers is more expensive than grayscale ink and uses more chemicals to manufacture, some of which are toxic pollutants or are extracted by cutting down trees for dye. Always use grayscale settings when printing/copying drafts and whenever color is unnecessary.
 - Sends meeting agendas and information electronically and offers online access for publications and forms**
 - Uses electronic data storage and filing as much as possible in order to reduce paper use**
 - Employees with a university ID have access to the [University of Rochester OneDrive](#) to store files across university and personal computers when logging into their Microsoft Accounts.
 - [Box](#) is also available to employees with University IDs.
 - Removes unnecessary cover sheets from all printed documents and uses narrow margins and small font where possible**
 - Reuses single-sided printed paper as scrap paper and for draft printing.**
 - Makes use of softcopy editing and print preview**
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WASTE REDUCTION & RECYCLING

Waste is an inevitable by-product of any work environment, and offices are no exception. Fortunately, a fair amount of office waste can be avoided. Following the [Rochester Zero-Waste Hierarchy \(or R5 program\)](#) ultimately limits the amount of material sent to landfills by

rethinking, reducing, reusing and recycling or composting. Rethinking first, then reducing initial resource consumption are the most sustainable actions you can take. Afterwards, reusing and recycling correctly are the next best things to do.

The following section outlines simple procedures and provides resources that will enable your office to make the best use of its resources, from cradle to grave. You will find more items aligned with the Rochester Zero-Waste Hierarchy in the Purchasing, Catering and Kitchen sections of this document.

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Has designated collection spots for unwanted materials and office supplies that can be reused by others.**
- Shares communal office supplies such as staplers, tape dispensers, hole punchers, laminators, scissors, etc.**
- Has made an effort to rethink the need for new or purchased items and evaluate what is purchased.**
 - Conduct a survey or have informal conversation with colleagues to determine what might not be needed in the office. See the 'Purchasing' section below for more details.
- Has recycling bins placed next to trash bins in common areas.**
 - To order new bins or replace missing bins, please call the following numbers in your [respective location](#):
 - River Campus – (585) 273-4567
 - Strong Memorial Hospital – (585) 275-6255
 - School of Medicine and Dentistry – (585) 275-9203
 - Laboratory for Laser Energetics – (585) 275-8652
 - Eastman School of Music – (585) 276-8922
 - Memorial Art Gallery – (585) 276-8922
 - Offsite locations – (585) 275-2082
- Recycles electronics as per University guidelines.**
 - University IT offers free electronic recycling and secure memory disposal services for University faculty, staff, and students. Visit the University IT's [Equipment Recovery Program website](#) to learn more about this service and to request a pickup.
- Recycles used toner and printer cartridges as per University guidelines.**
 - You can mail inkjet and toner cartridges to University Mail Services for free recycling. To do so, please place parts in original or replacement packaging and mail to PO Box 270001.
 - **On River Campus**, you can drop off cartridges at:
 - Campus Mail Center (at the counter)
 - Wilson Commons: Common Connection
 - Any Residential Life Area Office
 - **At the Medical Center**, you can drop off cartridges at:
 - Saunders Research Building Vending Machine Area (1.104)
 - Med Center Post Office (G5142)

- Recycles rechargeable batteries as per University guidelines.**
 - The University only recycles rechargeable batteries in accordance with both Monroe County Environmental Services and NYSDEC guidelines. Please note this does not include alkaline batteries. Contact the Environmental Compliance Unit at 585-275-3241 if your area is interested in arranging a battery collection location. Alternatively, you can drop off your batteries at the following locations:
 - On **River Campus**, drop off batteries at:
 - Wilson Commons: Common Connections
 - At the **Medical Center**, drop off batteries at:
 - Biological Supply Center, G-8633
 - Parking Office at Strong Memorial Hospital Garage, G-0612A
 - School of Medicine and Dentistry Environmental Services Office, G-6305
- Has recycling posters put up in common areas.**
 - To view and download official recycling posters for your department, visit the University's [Sustainability Toolkit](#).
- Reuses interdepartmental mail envelopes as much as possible.**
 - Window envelopes without written information can be reused. When they have reached their end of life, they can be recycled with other paper.
- Reuses/recycles packaging materials.**
 - Most packaging material, including packaging peanuts, air cushions, bubble wrap, and boxes, are reusable. Create a reuse station in your office area. On River Campus, these items are also collected for reuse at the Campus Mail Center in Todd Union.
 - When material has reached its end of life, much of it can be recycled through the regular recycling stream or special collection programs. Plastic bags, air cushions, and bubble wrap can be collected through [special plastic bag recycling programs](#). Cardboard and packing paper can be recycled in the regular paper/cardboard recycling stream.
- Recycles other office materials as per University guidelines.**
 - Visit the University's [Recycling webpage](#) for a complete guide on how to go about recycling office materials.

PURCHASING

University of Rochester seeks to promote sustainability not only within its internal operations, but also in the supply chains that feed into it. We live in a highly interdependent world, and being sustainable goes beyond personal choices and actions; sustainability requires effort by and affects a much larger community. The following guidelines will assist you in promoting sustainable choices both within and beyond your office setting.

PURCHASING: OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Buys all materials in bulk and consolidates smaller orders into one large order.**

- Bulk and group purchases are not only cheaper but also help to reduce the amount of packaging materials used and the greenhouse gases released during the transportation processes.
- ☐ **Prioritizes purchasing from suppliers with a demonstrated commitment to sustainability.**
 - Perform research on your vendors (even those that are University-approved) and look into the most sustainable opportunities for the event you are hosting. Reach out to [the Sustainable Procurement team](#) for more information.
 - Pay attention to things like where vendors source their materials (considering distance and emissions, potential human rights issues, etc.), if they have demonstrable commitments to reduce carbon emissions or achieve net zero, and whether they use responsibly sourced materials (e.g., recycled or repurposed, sustainable forestry, etc.).
- ☐ **Purchases durable and reusable office supplies from Staples and other University-approved suppliers.**
 - Sometimes it's worth paying more for a product that will last longer than having to replace it more frequently.
- ☐ **Prioritizes purchasing items that minimize the use of single-use plastic.**
 - Many common items in the workplace come packaged in plastic. When placing orders, avoid brands or products that tend to use more packaging than necessary. Many products these days can be purchased entirely without plastic; for instance, they may come wrapped entirely in paper and cardboard.
- ☐ **Purchases products containing pre- and/or post-consumer recycled content, those that are [ECOLOGO Certified](#), or other environmentally friendly options.**
 - Staples uses logos in its catalog to distinguish such products.
- ☐ **Purchases the highest-rated Energy Star products where possible.**
 - For assistance with purchasing such products, contact Materials Management at 585-273-5819.
- ☐ **Considers buying used office furniture and supplies.**
 - The primary University-approved supplier for furniture is Workplace Interiors, which has pre-owned options that are typically cheaper, reduce waste, and conserve resources.
 - Departments and individuals can also utilize the [University's reuse programs](#).

Also, check out this [purchasing guide](#) made by SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry for some more information on office supplies, janitorial supplies, trade and facilities, food services/cafeteria, electronics, and apparel.

CATERING

Providing catering to colleagues or to event attendees can be a great way to encourage participation and improve morale, but it can also be a source of excessive waste from food, packaging, and single-use plastic. The following guidelines are recommended when ordering food at work. For more information on holding sustainable events, check out the [Green Events Handbook](#).

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Uses [University-approved catering services](#) and asks that the services minimize waste.**
 - When ordering catering, first ask if they have more sustainable options.
 - Ask about compostable or reusable tableware instead of single-use plastic utensils.
 - Ask if the caterers use locally sourced goods and organic ingredients.
 - Order vegetarian and vegan-diet based options and minimize animal products.
 - The big aluminum trays supplied for catering are recyclable, but must be washed and cleared of food waste.
 - Orders in bulk for large groups and does not purchase individual boxes.**
 - Provides reusable dishware and silverware or encourages employees to bring their own to catered events.**
 - Uses reusable tablecloths instead of disposable ones.**
 - Makes an effort to accurately determine the number of attendants beforehand to prevent overbuying and creating a food surplus.**
 - Ensures any leftover food is distributed to others rather than thrown in the trash.**
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KITCHEN

Although they tend to be overlooked, kitchens and breakrooms produce a considerable amount of waste that ends up in the landfill. As such, these are key areas where sustainable practices should be ensured. The following are ways your office can be more sustainable in its kitchen.

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Has a recycling station in the kitchen area and recycles all appropriate kitchen material(s), including boxes, cans, plastics, and all other applicable materials.**
 - [Contact the Sustainability Office](#) if you are missing recycling bins or signage for this station.
- Has easy access to clean and filtered tap water.**
 - To evaluate the need for a water fountain/filtration unit installation in your office, contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 or submit an [online work request](#).
- Encourages the use of reusable water bottles, discourages the use of disposable water bottles, and recycles any plastic water bottles we generate.**
- Has reusable kitchen utensils available.**
- Uses reusable food containers.**
 - When eating at River Campus Dining Locations, make use of the Reusable Clamshell Program instead of using disposable containers.
- Has a set of reusable mugs and/or cups.**

- For those on River Campus, make use of the Reusable Mug Program, which offers discounted coffee refills at Connections, Starbucks, Grab and Go, and Pete's.
- If needing to use disposable options (cups, plates, utensils, etc.), uses low-plastic or paper/biodegradable ones.**
- Practices a zero tolerance for Styrofoam by not using Styrofoam kitchen products and asking vendors to use recyclable alternatives.**
- Uses non-toxic and biodegradable cleaning supplies.**
- Has access to communal rather than individual kitchen appliances such as coffee makers, refrigerators, etc.**
- Purchases communal food such as tea, coffee, and condiments in bulk.**
- Avoids coffee pods and uses a reusable, refillable pod or a traditional coffee maker for drip coffee.**
- Prioritizes purchasing fair trade and organic food products whenever possible.**

TRANSPORTATION

The University of Rochester aims to be a commuter-friendly institution that offers a variety of ways of traveling between its campuses and to other locations. With tens of thousands of employees, the University has a significant carbon footprint just from commuting alone. The following are ways in which your office can reduce its transportation footprint. Learn more about the [Green Commuter program](#) to take full advantage of alternative transportation resources and incentives at the University.

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Has access to bike racks.**
 - The Department of Transportation and Parking Management (DTPM) has installed numerous bike racks near all major buildings to allow for a convenient way to secure bicycles. Click [here](#) to view all bike rack locations and to learn more about biking services offered by the University.
 - To evaluate the need for a bike rack installation near your office, contact the Facilities Customer Services Center at 585-273-4567 or submit an [online work request](#).
 - Following the 2025 summer construction, the Department of Transportation and Logistics will be updating this website in regard to new bike racks, bike share locations, and cycle tracks.
- Uses the University Shuttle service.**
 - Check out the University [bus schedule](#) and the many different lines that give access to all parts of campus and beyond.
- Encourages the use of carpooling, ride-sharing, and alternative transportation, especially when it comes to traveling to off-site locations.**

- Considers holding meetings online on Zoom or Teams as an alternative to traveling. When possible for applicable positions, remote work is also considered to cut down on carbon emissions.**
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INNOVATION & EDUCATION

This guide is by no means exhaustive of all the things you can do to promote sustainability in your office. We encourage you to explore other resources to find more ways to make your office setting more sustainable. The following are ways your office can go a step further in promoting a “sustainable culture” among its members.

OUR OFFICE/DEPARTMENT...

- Has at least one Green Rep.**
 - As part of the University’s Employees for Sustainability program, Green Reps are employees who advocate for sustainability efforts, serve as liaisons between their department and University administration, and help in raising sustainability awareness within their departments. Click [here](#) to learn more about Green Reps and to sign up to be a Green Rep for your department.
 - Includes this Green Office Guide in new member orientation.**
 - Encourages current members to follow the applicable actions in this Green Office Guide.**
 - Has a sustainability suggestion box for use by all office members.**
 - Has set up an inter-office resource exchange program that shares surplus and reusable materials.**
 - Has applicable signage provided by the Sustainability Office posted or electronically shared throughout the office.**
 - Signage can be downloaded from the [Sustainability Toolkit](#) available on the Sustainability website.
 - Signage includes:
 - Recycling guidance to post on/above recycling bins.
 - Flyers on specialty recycling and reuse programs.
 - Upcoming sustainability events on campus.
 - And more!
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