



The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life  
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## HOW TO “GREEN” YOUR HOME

Holiness can be created anywhere; it is not confined just to the synagogue. In Jewish environmental ethics, one of the most important ways of expressing *kedusha* – holiness – is through the greening of physical space, wherever it may be.

It is important to green your home, office, and synagogue because the built environment has a profound impact on our natural environment, economy, health and productivity. In the United States alone, buildings account for:

- 72 percent of electricity consumption;
- 39 percent of energy use;
- 38 percent of all carbon dioxide emissions;
- 40 percent of raw material use;
- 30 percent of waste output; and
- 14 percent of potable water consumption.

The benefits of greening your building include:

- protecting ecosystems and biodiversity;
- improving air and water quality;
- reducing solid waste;
- conserving natural resources;
- reducing the building’s operating costs;
- enhancing asset value and profits;
- improving employee productivity and satisfaction;
- optimizing life cycle economic performance;
- improving the air, thermal and acoustic environments;
- enhancing employee comfort and health;
- minimizing strain on local infrastructure; and
- contributing to the overall quality of life of the office community.

In order to green your office, GreenFaith, after many years of helping religious communities green their congregations, recommends the following steps for any organization launching environmental efforts:

## **1. Form a Green Team:**

The first step is to form a Green Team, a group of leaders responsible for planning and overseeing your environmental initiatives. Members of the best Green Teams care about the environment and represent different areas of responsibility within your office. Good Green Teams include leaders within your office who know how to get others involved. It is critical that the head of the office take an active role in the Green Team in order to give it credibility and make it a success. Forming a Green Team is the best way to get your office's environmental initiatives off to a strong start.

## **2. Take Quick Action and Communicate:**

In order to build momentum for your efforts, take a few quick actions. Here are some examples:

- Hold a compact fluorescent light bulb sale.
- Invite your co-workers to sign an environmental petition.
- Sponsor an environmental-educational forum.

Taking quick actions allows you to identify supporters within your institution and build momentum for future efforts. But don't stop once you've taken action. Successful institutions communicate actively about their accomplishments. They understand that by celebrating small victories, they lay the foundation for long term success.

## **3. Have the Office Leader or a Guest Speaker Give a Green Lecture or Communication, and Have Co-workers Affirm their Environmental Values:**

A good way to build momentum is through a lecture or program (e.g. a short documentary) focused on environmental ethics. A lecture raises awareness and moves your office community along its path to environmental action as it publicly establishes the values that the community is trying to express. As part of the program, ask co-workers to express the spiritual or secular basis of their interest in environmentalism and what actions they have taken in their own lives. After the program, get your co-workers involved in the office greening campaign by providing them with the opportunity to sign a pledge or letter affirming their environmental values. Post the letter or pledge in a prominent location for several weeks, giving your co-workers the chance to embrace these values publicly. Once your co-workers have stated their beliefs publicly, they're more likely to support future environmental initiatives.

## **4. Conduct an Audit and Make a Plan:**

Assessing or auditing your office's current environmental activities provides an important foundation for future efforts. This audit should not only include the physical facility and its maintenance but also other activities that could become a part of the campaign, such as office fundraising for social action causes. It is very important that the Green Team invest the time and effort to complete this audit, or a comparable tool. Once you've conducted your audit, review its results and make an action plan for the coming year. Set specific, achievable goals within a specific timeframe. List the resources you'll need to succeed. Good planning is an integral part of successful environmental leadership. By creating the audit, you will also be able to calculate if you have achieved the 14 percent energy reduction goal of the Jewish Energy Covenant Campaign.

## 5. Work Your Plan and Be Persistent:

It is often the case that many communities have an initial burst of environmental programming that is often followed by a long period of inactivity. While all institutions need time to rest after launching a new initiative, the institutions that enjoy the most environmental success are the ones that demonstrate persistence, and that are disciplined and intentional about working their environmental plan.

There are several things you can do to help your institution build environmental momentum. Your Green Team can set a regular meeting date every four to six weeks to identify new activities and assess your progress. You can provide an article or an eco-tip for your office's communication platforms such as newsletters. You can find other offices nearby that also are involved in environmental efforts and perhaps create joint programming. Persistence pays off, so work hard and you will succeed.

### Priority Areas:

#### *Priority #1: Use Fuel Efficient Transportation to Reduce Harmful Tailpipe Exhaust and Greenhouse Gas Emissions*

Many researchers have concluded that transportation represents the greatest negative environmental impact created by the average U.S. citizen. Encourage people to use mass transit, buy cars getting at least 30 miles per gallon, carpool, bike – and, most importantly, walk wherever possible. Get people to calculate their transportation-related carbon footprint and then ask them to reduce it by 14 percent. Some synagogues have instituted a regular carbon free Shabbat when members walk or bike to services. Something similar can be done at the office once a month.

#### *Priority #2: Eat Less Meat and Fish to Reduce Toxic Contamination and Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and to Reduce Cruelty to Animals*

Meat production is the leading source of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, and creates enormous amounts of toxic waste. Animals are treated with appalling cruelty on factory farms. Ocean fish populations are rapidly declining, and fish farming releases large amounts of pollution. Encourage employees to decrease their consumption of meat, dairy and fish at meals during the workday and create a weekly vegetarian lunch program.

#### *Priority #3: Conserve Energy to Fight Air Pollution and Climate Change*

Conserve energy by using a programmable thermostat, decreasing temperature when parts of the office are not being used. Use energy efficient lighting such as compact fluorescent light bulbs. Create a campaign to make sure that lights, computers and other electronic equipment are turned off when not in use. Improve insulation throughout the office, especially around windows. If the company owns the whole facility, plan future renovations to replace the building's old boilers, furnaces and air-conditioning units with modern energy efficient ones. Reduce the water temperature on water heaters to no more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

Contact a local solar installer to see if the building can accommodate solar panels and check out if your state government provides subsidies or grants for solar installations and other energy improvements. If possible, buy the office's electrical power from a "Green-e" certified company that uses sustainable sources, such as wind and solar.

*Priority #4: Make Your Office a Toxic-Free Zone to Protect Human Health and the Environment*

Studies have linked ingredients in many cleaning, pest management and lawn-care products to cancer, reproductive disorders, respiratory problems and other ailments. It is important that the office become a toxic free zone by using green cleaning products, organic lawn care and alternative pest management strategies. Make the commitment to purchase products with full ingredient lists and plant based ingredients.

*Priority #5: Create Outdoor Community Programs to Strengthen the Bond with Creation*

The average U.S. citizen spends more than 90 percent of his or her life indoors, which weakens our bond with Creation. Try to encourage your co-workers to spend some time each week outside. This healthy habit is the best way to deepen people's motivation to green their lives and become environmental leaders.

Source: COEJL