

12 Reopening Tips For Getting Back To Business Sustainably



Why Prioritize Sustainability?

According to a [JP Morgan insight report](#), policy makers and investors are viewing COVID-19 as “... the 21st century’s first “sustainability” crisis and one that has renewed the focus on climate change, acting as a wake-up call for decision makers to prioritize a more sustainable approach to investment.”

A [KPMG survey](#) of 500 CEOs in 11 key markets in the Americas, Asia and Europe showed that “business leaders want to preserve and build upon their organizations’ sustainability and ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) accomplishments during the crisis.” And that “89 percent of CEOs want to ‘lock in’ their sustainability and climate change gains.”

One [investment bank chief](#) believes that all Wall Street research will soon include an ESG score. “If you’re not moving forward on things like the environment, you’ll be uninvestable in certain parts of the investor universe... it’s just becoming too important to investors.”

Businesses across the country are starting to see their offices return to capacity as workers return full-time or on a hybrid schedule.

While the pandemic has made safety a top-of-mind priority, rightly so, businesses should remember that sustainability does not have to be sacrificed. In fact, it should be a priority.

Here are 12 reopening tips to help you restart and get your office back to business, with sustainability in mind.

**1 Address PPE
and Other
Single-Use Items**

Over the course of the pandemic, many people moved to single-use items in the misguided notion that single-use was safer than reuse. But studies show that reuse is as safe, and single-use items can be contaminated as well, as they are often handled by workers before reaching customers, even if they come pre-wrapped.

To reduce single-use items in waste streams, some businesses are purchasing reusable utensils and mugs for their staff to keep. In the long run, this will be cheaper and reduce overall waste generation.

As for PPE, make sure staff understand that they must dispose of PPE properly, and that they cannot be recycled in most instances.

Personal Protective Equipment
DISPOSAL

DONATE
Consider donating excess, unused PPE to healthcare and essential workers.

COMPOST
PPE made with natural latex can be sorted to a diverted organics stream, if available. Some commercial organics programs may also accept PLA-based gloves.

COLLECT
Implement a specialty collection program for PPE through Great Forest's suggested vendors.

TRASH
Be sure to place used PPE in trash bins, not the environment, when other disposal alternatives are unavailable.

**2 Reconnect,
Engage, Educate**

Enlist and mobilize employees to act as sustainability champions and messengers. Reconstitute your green teams and appoint a green team leader. Restart regular education programs to remind staff about how your waste program works, and alert them to any changes in processes or procedures.

If you contract directly with a waste provider, reconnect with your hauler to review pick-up frequency, and make sure you are not paying to haul air.

3 Ensure Compliance

Regulations are often updated and new requirements added. So make sure your reopening plans include a compliance check of regulations that apply to your business. Remember, requirements change depending on where your business is located. Even if all your offices or outlets are located in the same state, local laws may differ.



[Download our free sustainable waste management regulatory compliance guide](#) to help you maintain compliance with local laws and avoid costly fines.

4 Get A Waste Infrastructure Checkup

Have waste bins been moved in the months since your office was fully occupied? Is signage still up? Are you in compliance? A waste infrastructure checkup will let you know if your program is ready to perform effectively when workers return.



Great Forest's Waste Infrastructure ScorecardSM does this by examining each aspect of a facility's waste collection process against both legal requirements and best practices, from education to disposal. The scorecard provides a clear picture of a facility's current internal waste infrastructure and recommendations for improvement. [Learn more about how to get your building score](#), and download the [scorecard manual](#) to how scores are calculated.

Building owners: Undertake preventive maintenance for your compactors and other waste equipment.

5 Move To A Centralized Bin System

Take the opportunity to make improvements now. Switching to a centralized bin system is one easy upgrade.

This involves the removal of all deskside bins and the installation of a dedicated system of communal trash, recycling, and organics bins.



Research shows this setup leads to increased waste diversion, cost savings, reduced emissions, enhanced productivity. It's simple and effective. Learn more in our [white paper](#).

6 Implement Changes, Starting With Paper

Now is an opportunity to be ambitious with policies and programs that reduce waste. Since paper can make up a big percentage of waste for offices, look at the major sources of paper use and select one area that can go paperless.

7 Reassess With A Waste Audit

Plan to conduct a waste audit soon after workers return to see how your waste stream has changed, and to identify what is being used and thrown out so you can respond with education or implementation of specialty diversion programs. Read our [deep dive into waste audits in FMJ magazine](#).

Get The "Fresh Start" Effect

Now may be the biggest opportunity businesses have to implement changes that lead to growth and success. The pandemic has shattered many routines and social scientists believe this disruption offers a unique opportunity to set and achieve new goals. So go ahead and be ambitious.

"There's lots of evidence for what's called post-traumatic growth," Laurie Santos, a psychology professor at Yale, told the [New York Times](#).

"We have this blank slate to work on," noted Katy Milkman, a professor at the Wharton School, whose research focuses on the science of new beginnings. "There's an opportunity to rethink. What do we want a work day to look like?"

8 Formalize Changes

Formalize your policies and procedures. For example, if you plan to only purchase paper with recycled content, make sure that it is codified in your purchasing manual so that the practice carries on even with personnel changes and other work interruptions

9 Track GHG From Waste

The May/June 2021 issue of Harvard Business Review points out that [scope 3 emissions represent](#) the bulk of greenhouse gas impact for many companies, but few track it. One way to start is to calculate and track GHG from waste. Learn more about how we [track waste-related emissions](#).

10 Prioritize Waste Reduction

Waste costs have been on the rise and the pandemic is continuing to push that trend upwards. Not only has the amount of waste generated increased over the pandemic, but contamination rates are also up. Contaminated recyclables cannot be recycled and lose their value. This means that businesses will end up paying to dispose of even more trash. And now with the [waste industry facing hiring difficulties](#), waste hauling rates may potentially increase even more.

Aside from costs, global concern about the impact of businesses on the environment remains high, and reducing waste is still one of the main ways to reduce that impact. Moving towards Zero Waste will be a key long-term solution. Learn more in [Zero Waste Business in 3 steps](#).

11 Pay Attention To Purchasing

Re-examine your purchasing. For example, look at what packaging is ending up in your waste stream. You can reduce plastic consumption by buying items like sanitizer in bulk (instead of individual-sized bottles).

Now is the time to look for vendors that offer less packaging or sustainable alternatives and make the switch to prioritize purchasing of items with recycled content and/or other sustainable designation such as sustainably harvested.

12 Address Organic Waste

If addressing organics is not already mandatory in your city/state, installing an organics diversion program will take you to the next level. With more employees bringing food from home and purchasing take-away food, reducing the amount of organics that go into the trash will make a big impact. Learn more in our [guide to organics](#).

Did you know: The average commercial office waste stream in the U.S. consists of approximately 77% recyclable and compostable materials, with only about 23% being real “trash.” Improperly-sorted organic waste makes up the largest percentage of the recycling stream (34%).