

Choosing Green Furniture

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The decision to go Green in your work space is smart, friendly to the environment and will help to make your work place healthier for your employees.

The concept of being “Green” and environmentally conscious is making its way into our industry’s everyday vocabulary. It’s a trend that is here to stay. Government mandates are requiring all new buildings to be LEED® certified and are requiring agencies to take a closer look at the products they are buying, ensuring that purchasers consider environmental and lifecycle costs in their value determinations. There are three key concepts to consider when purchasing furniture to promote a Green-friendly work environment: 1) emissions, 2) lifecycle costs 3) and overall manufacturer environmental responsibility.

Indoor air quality can have a major impact on the health, comfort, well-being and productivity of building occupants. Being proactive about reducing the potential pollutants in your workspaces will reduce employee complaints and create a more Green-friendly environment. It is important to ask your furniture supplier if they have tested their products to pass the BIFMA M7.1 Emission Test or have been Greenguard Certified. Both of these certifications require manufacturers to submit their products to an independent lab to test for emissions emanating from the furniture that pollute the surrounding area. Various workplace pollutants have become a real problem as buildings have become more or less sealed chambers, so ensuring that you are purchasing products that have passed these tests will reduce the amount of indoor air quality pollutants.

Another purchasing decision that requires attention when promoting Green in the workplace is the lifecycle of the furniture. A lifecycle assessment is the comprehensive examination of a product’s environmental and economic impacts throughout its lifetime. In some cases, evaluation of lifecycle costs may result in higher upfront costs with significantly lower long-term costs. Important questions to ask are:

- *Where were the raw materials extracted from?* Products that are made from raw materials from North America versus overseas reduce the environmental impact of transportation pollutants and benefits local economies.
- *Where was the product manufactured?* Products manufactured in America help support local economies and reduce environmental pol-

lution impacts because of strict laws regulating factory emissions and air pollutants.

- *What is the warranty on the furniture, and what does that warranty cover?* Choosing a quality product with a long life reduces landfill waste and operating and maintenance costs. Look for a comprehensive warranty with a long life backed by a dependable customer service program and easily available replacement parts that will extend product life.

- *How will the product be disposed of?* A recycling or return policy for used furniture significantly reduces the environmental impact of that furniture.

Research and compare environmental impacts when selecting a furniture manufacturer. Things to consider:

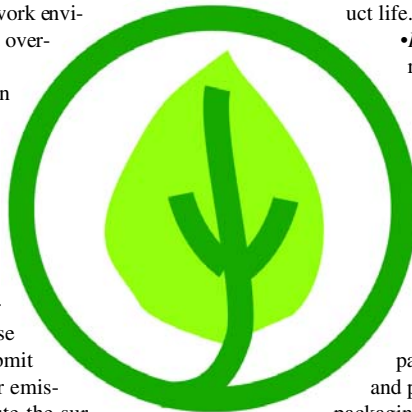
- *The product itself:* Does the manufacturer use quality components manufactured using consistent, reliable and safe raw materials? Have products been tested and certified to meet Green quality standards?

- *The packaging of the product:* Are products packaged to protect the product so that additional costs and pollutants are not incurred to send replacements? Are packaging materials recyclable to reduce landfill waste? Can

larger orders be shipped without boxes to reduce the amount of waste?

- *The manufacturing plant:* Does the manufacturer have an environmental statement in place that supports their Green efforts, including freight efficiencies, waste prevention and recycling programs?

When making purchasing decisions about furniture, consider the Green effects. Ask questions about the product, packaging and place of manufacture, and about the steps the manufacturer has taken to ensure a Green product is being sold. Include a lifecycle assessment in your final purchasing decision. The decision to go Green in your work space is smart, friendly to the environment and will help to make your work place healthier for your employees.



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