

# AN ORIENTATION TO SUSTAINABILITY AT WORK



**SUSTAINABILITY CAN BE ONE OF THOSE WORDS THAT STRETCH AND BEND TO TAKE ON MANY MEANINGS. IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS TIP SHEET IT REFERENCES SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: LIVING WITHIN IN OUR ENVIRONMENTAL LIMITS, SUPPORTING HEALTHY AND JUST SOCIETIES, AND A RESILIENCE ECONOMY. THESE ARE BROAD CONCEPTS THAT WILL TAKE MAJOR CHANGE. IT ALSO WILL TAKE SMALL CHANGES THAT MANY PEOPLE CAN DO. HERE ARE A FEW “HOW-TO’S” FOR THE WORKPLACE.**

## **STRATEGIC PURCHASING**

- Reduce work, costs, and waste by sharing, renting, reusing or rethinking. Some examples include the work-place norm of not providing printed handouts for meetings. [Dalhousie's Paper Policy](#) provides guidance on specific requirements and ideas.
- Purchase quality items that are energy and water efficient, durable, low-maintenance, low emissions, and have third-party certification like [ENERGY STAR®](#), [ECOLOGO](#), and [FAIRTRADE](#). Sustainable purchasing criteria should be in request for proposals, tenders, and contracts. [Dalhousie's purchasing policy](#) has sustainability language embedded in it that directs readers to required [sustainability criteria](#) for use in purchasing decisions. In addition, a [surplus good policy and program](#) helps to reuse items on campus and in the community.
- When ordering catering or having small events, order or use reusable items if possible, including water in jugs. It is simply the easiest way to reduce waste.

## **SORT IT OUT**

Today's contamination rates in the garbage stream (things that shouldn't be there like organics and recyclables) at many workplaces are still between 40 and 70%. Stop and think before tossing. Identify what goes where. There will be workplace guides to help you understand what materials go into what stream. At Dalhousie, there is a workplace [“What Goes Where Guide”](#) and specific standards of bins and signage by space.



### MAKE CONSERVATION A HABIT

Yes, it is the same list that you likely have heard before. Why is it constantly repeated? Hundreds and thousands of people who model conservation behaviour will make substantial sustainability impacts in a workplace. When looking at energy and water data, occupant behaviour can clearly influence key consumption trends. So ask a peer to help you make these actions a habit through some peer reminding:

- Turn off the lights and equipment.
- Shut the fume hood sash.
- Turn down the heat.
- Turn off the tap.
- Use a re-usable mug and water bottle.
- Reduce your waste and sort your stuff.
- Take the stairs where possible.

### REPORT IT

In workplaces, you could be the key eyes and ears for an area. Report to facilities management issues such as tap and window leaks, lights on when they should be off, and other potential energy and water issues.

### SUPPORT IT

Many workplaces participate in public sustainability reporting programs that have supportive policies and initiatives. There maybe opportunities to join relevant committees and take action. Dalhousie has a President's Advisory Council on Sustainability, reports publically through the [Sustainability Tracking Assessment Rating System \(STARS\)](#), and has a number of plans (ex. [Climate Change Plan](#)) and policies (ex. [Green Building Policy](#)).

### USE YOUR POWER

Whatever position you have at work you can influence sustainable actions. Appreciating and respecting people and nature can be practiced through active listening, caring, and a stewardship approach.

### MOVE AROUND

Commuting to and from work can provide an opportunity for exercise, reduce green houses gases, and create down time. Many workplaces have programs that support a variety of transportation demand management options. At Dalhousie check out the [SMART TRIP](#) website where information is available on a number of programs such as:

- The University Student Transit Pass (Upass) and the Employee Bus Pass (Epass).
- Ride Share program offering preferential parking for carpoolers.
- Car sharing services.
- The Bike Centre providing drop in tune-ups, educational classes, and events. Indoor and outdoor end-of-trip facilities are also available.
- Work shift policies that include tele-working and compressed work week.
- The Guaranteed Ride Home program that provides emergency taxi-chits to those taking alternative transportation.

### LIFE-CYCLE THINKING

When making decisions, consider the full costs of capital, operating and disposal. The best decision may cost more upfront, but saves in the long-term. Think through the ecological, health and social impacts of products purchased. Environmental product declarations (EPDs) provide life-cycle product information to potential buyers. A life-cycle analysis may often result in different decisions than those made solely on capital costs.

### ENGAGE AN ADVISOR

Speed up ideas and get advice for planning events, making purchases, or taking action on sustainability by contacting workplace experts. There maybe tools and resources already developed. Dalhousie has materials such as a [Sustainable Events Planning Guide](#), Checklists and Sustainability Maps and tours as examples.



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For more information on Dalhousie Sustainability Initiatives visit:  
<https://www.dal.ca/dept/sustainability-at-dal.html>