



The Business Value of Environmental Stewardship

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Making money *and* caring for the environment, that can't be real, can it? Yes it can, but only when you start thinking differently about environmental stewardship.

Whether it's at home, on the golf course, in your businesses, or at your school, more and more people have come to recognize the business value of environmental stewardship. People are taking voluntary steps that not only help the environment, but also make or save them money.

Make your green be *green*

The first step to linking a healthy environmental commitment with a healthy ledger is to conduct a site assessment. Find out where you're spending your financial resources. What are your greatest costs—energy, waste, resource selection? Once you do this you can begin to take actions that impact your green (financial) and the earth's green (nature).

Ask yourself: What are the resources that you use? Are they all necessary or are there ways to reduce the cost of resource use while still maintaining customer satisfaction, quality of life, etc.? How can you spend your money more efficiently or more effectively?

Here are several areas where resource savings can have a significant impact on the environment and your bottom line.

- **Consider your energy costs** – During the 1970s energy crunch, Americans paid attention to reducing their energy use through conservation. Thirty years later, there's a misperception that all of those "easy" ways to reduce energy usage have been exhausted. This is not true. The United States uses more energy than Western Europe and Central and South America combined—with 6% of the world's population we consume 30% of world's energy. This is not sustainable, nor is it economical.

Consider simple steps, like replacing light fixtures and worn out electrical equipment with high efficiency models (e.g., air conditioners, televisions, clothes washers and dryers). Studies have shown that investing in high efficiency energy upgrades can be less risky, with a higher return, than investing money in the stock market—especially these days.

Consider these points:

- Lighting in commercial buildings accounts for 40% of electricity costs.
 - Energy-efficient lighting upgrades can reduce bills by 35% - 40% per year.
 - 90% of the energy of an incandescent bulb is lost in heat.
- **Are there ways to better manage your water use?** – Look at your entire site to find “leaky” investments. Do you pay for the water you use to irrigate and maintain your lawn and landscape? By paying attention to where and how you use water, you’ll save money from washing down the drain.

First, eliminate non-targeted watering to sidewalks, pathways, or ponds by ensuring that your irrigation system is designed correctly and functioning properly. Incorporate evapotranspiration and weather data into your irrigation schedule. How often have you seen a sprinkler system watering a home or business lawn while it’s raining? If you have an automatic system, turn it off when rain is anticipated.

Consider ways to build in a water capture and reuse system to store stormwater—a simple rain barrel can offset irrigation supplies for homeowners, while a system of drainage pipes with a storage pond can work well for larger sites. Finally, look for opportunities to save water indoors. Fixing leaky faucets, replacing older, large-gallon toilets, and installing faucet aerators can result in dramatic water savings.

- **Can you reduce chemical use?** – What did you spend last year on fertilizers, pesticides, and all of the other chemical treatments needed to maintain your property? In all likelihood, it was more than you may have needed.

According to a recent poll of golf course superintendents, nearly half of all golf courses spend over \$100,000 per year on chemical control products, while another quarter spend between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year. By focusing on cultural practices and Integrated Pest Management programs, many courses are dramatically reducing chemical use and thus saving money. Based on preliminary evidence from ACSP golf members, it’s clear that the savings can be significant—from a few thousand dollars to over \$50,000 saved in chemical costs annually. While not nearly as dramatic, the same can be true at home, work, or school.

- **Are there things you can be doing to reduce other material use costs?** – Consider what other materials you could be reducing, reusing, or recycling. Conduct an audit of your waste stream. Where are food wastes, office and paper wastes, construction and grounds wastes, and other waste going? How might you reduce or reuse these? Do you compost and reuse that compost on landscaped areas? How can you reduce waste by operating a tighter logistics management system onsite?

In the end, there are many ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle that will also save you money.

- **Are there any other ways to reduce costs?** – If you're a business, ask your insurance provider if they'll reduce your rates when you reduce your chemical risk (use). Many insurance providers are willing to consider the "environmental components" of any risk reduction program.

The bottom line

All of these steps are an investment worth making. In many cases, your return on investment will easily match other projects you're considering on site. Whether participating in Audubon International programs, or other environmental initiatives, the bottom line is to *keep the bottom line in mind*.

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