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Cut Costs with an Energy Emissions Profile Jennifer Lawler



Jan 15, 2010 -

Reducing emissions - the pollutants, especially carbon dioxide, that are produced when fuel combusts - greener your business and helps you save money.

The problem for many small business owners is knowing where to start. One idea: using an energy emissions profile to develop a plan to cut waste. An energy emissions profile (which may also be called an energy audit) shows where you're using the most energy in your business.

"Look at your electricity use, heating and transportation," advises Jeff Severin, the director of Kansas University's Center for Sustainability. Those are the areas companies tend to use the most energy.

Michael Meehan, the CEO of Carbonetworks, a company that helps companies achieve their sustainability goals, says that once information is collected, cost effective ways of reducing energy emissions (and energy costs) can be developed. Carbonetworks uses a software platform to accomplish this, but there are other ways to analyze your energy consumption.

"People can use [online] calculators to estimate their carbon footprint," says Severin. One such calculator can be found at the Environmental Protection Agency's website. You can also use energy meters for appliances, he says.

Reviewing utility and transportation bills can help you identify the major areas your emissions are coming from, says Severin. "Use that to prioritize strategies."

As much as 20% or more energy use can typically be traced to office equipment and computer use. "Do an internal audit of what is being used," suggests Severin. "Then figure out, 'Do we need the equipment on all the time? Do we need a printer on everyone's desk?'"

Meehan recommends opting for energy efficient lighting and using optimization technology on desktops. Your carbon footprint is also affected by employee travel, including commuting, as well as shipping. Looking at each of these in turn helps you develop plans to reduce energy waste.

Nate Gilmore, vice president of marketing and business development for Shipwire, an on-demand global warehouse and shipping network, says, "When you're dealing with the movement of goods the trick to lessen emissions is to make the goods travel less distance." Making goods travel less distance also saves money: "There's a tight correlation between shipping cost and shipping distance."

For greening your shipping, Gilmore suggests:

- Ship by ground transportation when possible.
When shipping, pack your containers with inventory, not air or pallets.
Packaging should be efficient and meet carrier standards.

Joe Alexander, the general manager of Keetsa, a mattress company, says, "We specially engineered our mattresses so they can be packed in a box that fits in the back of a car." That means the products take up considerably less room during transportation. More can be shipped on a freighter or a truck, thereby reducing the emissions produced per piece.

Meehan suggests eliminating face-to-face meetings in favor of virtual meetings, and also recommends using hybrid vehicles for transportation. For long-distance travel, be mindful of the impact of airplane emissions. Severin uses an emissions calculator to show that impact: a person traveling from Omaha to San Diego by train produces 0.3 tons of emissions; by car 0.75; by plane, more than 1 ton.

"Remember that energy savings has two parts," Severin says. "Technology and behavior change. You can upgrade your facilities and change your computer settings, but if users don't participate - such as by turning on lights when they leave the room - then you're not getting everything out of it that you can. So there's a big education component. Make sure your staff are aware of what the company is trying to do, and that they are aware of the best practices."

While the amount of money a small business could expect to save by cutting emissions depends on many factors, Meehan says that many companies find they save 10 - 20%, while technology companies, which rely heavily on energy, can save 40 - 50%.

Tags: energy, financialmanagement, jennifer lawler, saving money

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