

# The Green Office

## Chapter FastFACTS

- 1. More cost-saving, eco-friendly products will become available for medical offices.**
- 2. The construction industry is becoming increasingly attuned to the impact of the environment on healing.**
- 3. Initial steps toward a green practice include using recycled paper products and finding used equipment that can work for your office.**
- 4. Other ideas to make your practice green range from getting a free energy audit to supporting carpools for office staff.**
- 5. Sustainable building design includes such initiatives as improving storm water quality and quantity; harvesting daylight; and using natural, local materials.**

**T**he basic tenets of running an eco-friendly practice are neither rocket science nor very sexy, Dr. Chaudhuri says: reduce, recycle, reuse, and re-purchase. While some of these efforts seem cutting edge by today's standards, new incentives, products, expectations, and more affordable prices will make them the new normal for your office by 2015.

Your office today probably has a ways to go before becoming a green practice. "Most practices are doing some things to protect the environment, but not enough," Ms. Capko says. Incentives to going green can range from the subjective—the impression it gives patients of your concerns for the planet and

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the cultural message this sends to everyone who has contact with your practice—to the cost savings from purchasing recycled products and recycling ink. While other issues may seem more pressing now, by 2015 this one will become more appealing as more cost-saving products appear, she predicts. The first step? Start investigating eco-friendly ideas and get a feel for what they really mean for your practice's bottom line.



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**Tom Boldt, CEO**  
The Boldt Company  
Appleton, Wis.

## It'll Be Easy Being Green

An eco-friendly building incorporates the link between the environment and healing, says Tom Boldt, CEO of The Boldt Company, an award-winning construction company in Appleton, Wis., that has completed over 20 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) projects (LEED is an internationally recognized green-building certification system) and was the first construction company to join Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources Green Tier program. “More and more people [in the construction industry] are tapping into this thought process and are seeing the benefits. This will be a very exciting and eye-opening industry in 2015 and beyond,” he says. “We are only limited by our creativity.”

Eco-friendly construction is not just a passing trend, says David A. Schultz, co-founder of DAS Architects in Philadelphia. “I don't think [green initiatives are] a fad. ... Within the next 10 years it is just going to be the way it is,” he says. He attributes this change to bottom-line common sense: “You save money and energy, and [that] translates into operating costs,” he says. Cost- and energy-saving ideas include these:

- high-efficiency windows

- well-insulated buildings
- energy-efficient lamps
- natural ventilation when possible

Creating a green building involves a lot of seemingly small changes, “but the cumulative affect is pretty large,” says Mr. Schultz. For more ideas for your office, see “Green Construction: Leading the Way.”



**“How good does an image have to be for a doctor to be able to look at it and say, ‘I am confident. I am not worried about being sued for malpractice?’”**

**Jeff Bauer, PhD**

Health Futurist, Medical Economist  
 Author, *Paradox and Imperatives in Health Care: How Efficiency, Effectiveness, and E-Transformation Can Conquer Waste and Optimize Quality*

When it comes to day-to-day operations, Dr. Chaudhuri says she finds it easier than ever to run a green office. For example, she no longer has to go outside her network of vendors to find recyclable paper products such as copy paper and paper towels. It’s also encouraging that prices for those items have already dropped and are the same as regular products—or even lower. For more ideas, see “Ten Ways to Make Your Office Green.”

Dr. Chaudhuri has also found another way to recycle: She recently received free equipment from a retired physician, including a scale, an examination table, and a file cabinet. “All of this stuff would have ended up in a landfill somewhere,” she says. Instead, she says it saved her practice “a huge amount of money,” noting that an examination table alone can cost \$900. If you need new furniture or equipment, but lack the money in the budget, she suggests approaching hospitals that are renovating

### Changes in Tax Deduction for Medical Equipment



Read about how you can take advantage of the new cap on medical equipment deductions for 2010 in the latest issue of *Doctor's Digest-Money Matters* at [www.doctorsdigest.net](http://www.doctorsdigest.net).

## Green Construction: Leading the Way

Gary Kusnierz, vice president of performance excellence at Affinity Health Systems in Appleton, Wis., designs buildings for healthcare businesses with the environment in mind. “We apply philosophies for continuous improvement, evidence-based design to help enhance the patient experience, and sustainable design criteria that meet one of our core values—stewardship,” he says. Here are his tips and examples of achievable green initiatives for your practice:

**Maximize energy performance:** Consider using higher-end mechanical electrical plumbing systems. Look at ways to reduce your gas, electrical, and water consumption.

**Use daylight harvesting:** During winter, use sensor controls that can turn off your lighting system for parts of the day to reduce electricity. But because having more light in the practice has a positive influence on care, he recommends using your windows to increase the amount of daylight that enters your practice—and he advises that you shut down lights that aren’t required on sunny days.

**Improve storm water quality and quantity:** Use a sheet drain, or create a pond where storm water will go and sediment will sink to the bottom. The benefits include improving the quality and quantity of storm water

or closing. They may need to unload furniture or exam room equipment that is still usable, and she says they are likely to welcome your query.

## Addressing Noise Pollution

Reducing noise in your office involves more than creating a tranquil atmosphere—although that is important. It’s also about ensuring confidentiality—providing a space to secure private information, says Gary Kusnierz, vice president of performance excellence at Affinity Health Systems in Appleton, Wis. He says noise reduction is part of the Green Guidelines for Healthcare—a best-practices guide for healthy and sustainable building design, construction, and operations for the healthcare industry that integrates enhanced environmental and health principles and practices into the planning, design, construction, operations, and maintenance of healthcare facilities. Here’s what the guidelines

before filtering it back into the earth. Landscape designs help connect nature to the building, providing a tranquil setting.

**Use natural, local materials:** Work local stones, rock sediment, and trees into your practice design. The stone offers a natural architectural design. If applicable, selecting a stone from a nearby quarry also provides reduction in transportation costs, fuel costs, and gas emissions, thus helping to support financial as well as environmental issues.

**Use materials with recycled content:** This reduces the amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emitted as gasses from certain solids and liquids, impacting indoor air quality. In addition to measuring VOCs on projects, some companies measure for respirable particulates, e.g., carbon monoxide, and formaldehyde to ensure that indoor air quality is maintained. Find a carpet made of recycled fiber.

**Use formaldehyde-free products:** Formaldehyde-free green fiber boards were expensive five years ago, but prices have fallen and will continue to fall as demand increases. Formaldehyde-free boards don't have off-gassing—an odor that is a byproduct of boards containing formaldehyde.

**Use construction waste-management recycling.** This will reduce the amount of debris in landfills.

say about noise in healthcare environments, according to Mr. Kusnier: “Noise is a well-documented source of stress in healthcare settings. Noise from personnel, equipment, and visitors impacts patient privacy and sleep patterns. In turn, noise increases stress levels for patients and caregivers. Research finds that in hospitals [with] reduced noise levels, the patients’ satisfaction with care giving increased, their sleep improved, and their blood pressure lowered; similarly, staff in low-noise environments were more positive about their jobs and [patients] indicated improved sleep.”

To address noise in your office, first determine where the noise is coming from. Design solutions might include insulation between rooms from the floor on one level up to the floor on the next. Specially designed ceiling tiles, wall coverings, and flooring can also reduce noise transmission. To see that result, acoustical sound tests can be conducted in your current

## Ten Ways to Make Your Office Green

Cassie Walker, sustainability consultant at Three Elements Consulting LLC, Los Angeles, and author of *The Green Office Handbook*, offers these tips for greening your practice:

- If you're expanding or moving into a new space, talk to a **green architect** or interior designer about green options like low-VOC paints and carpets, which emit less-toxic volatile organic compounds than standard versions. Learn more about green building at the U.S. Green Building Council at <http://www.usgbc.org>.
- Contact your energy provider about a **free energy audit**. It will recommend changes to reduce your energy use.
- Install **timers** on thermostats and motion sensors on lights to cut energy use.
- Purchase **Energy Star-rated equipment** like computers, monitors, and copiers, then plug everything into power strips. Power everything down each day, then flip the switch on the strip to eliminate needless energy use at night.
- Add **aerators** to all faucets in order to cut water use by half without a decrease in pressure.

space, then repeated when you redesign that space. Companies like Affinity can test and measure the average sound absorption coefficient through measurement of the reverberation time along with other tests set forth by ASTM C423 standard test methods. The results meet or exceed the Green Guide for Health-care's highest standards.

## A Sure Way to Green Your Office

One way to make your practice green is by offering e-visits, which reduce the times people need to travel by car (see Chapter 4). E-visits also reduce the need for the doctor to go to the office, Dr. Bauer says. He says physicians who have already done telemedicine like the efficiency as well as the lifestyle e-visits offer. "They can go home, pull out their laptop, and [do] in about an hour what would have been two hours of grueling work at the office," he says.

- Eliminate bottled water services by switching to a **filtration system** that taps directly into the water line in the wall, eliminating the transportation of water.
- Switch to less-toxic **green cleaning products** to greatly improve your indoor air quality. Most cleaning companies are already offering to use green products.
- **Recycle** everything you can, then buy recycled products such as paper products made from at least 30% recycled content. Cut paper use by making double-sided copies standard, and use the savings for recycled content paper.
- Replace disposables with **reusable items**—washing or sterilizing will actually use less water and energy than making and shipping disposable versions.
- Start an office **carpool** (try [www.eRideShare.com](http://www.eRideShare.com)) or encourage public transportation by providing vouchers to employees. In addition to the environmental benefits, you'll save money on parking fees.

While you and your staff need to learn what's appropriate for this type of physician-patient interaction and how to get paid for it, the technical part is not as onerous as you may think. Your practice could charge a nominal fee for an e-visit. Certain insurance carriers are already reimbursing for e-visits. (Cigna, Aetna, United, and Wellpoint are a few.) For more information, see the Technology and Communication chapter in "Top-tier Communication," the September/October 2010 issue of *Doctor's Digest*,

### Understanding Which IRA is Best For You

It may be a Roth IRA instead of a traditional IRA now that new health insurance legislation is taking effect. Find out more in the latest issue of *Doctor's Digest-Money Matters* at [www.doctorsdigest.net](http://www.doctorsdigest.net).



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To get comfortable with the idea of communicating online with patients, Dr. Bauer recommends first learning how to deal with e-mails and attachments. Next, recognize that cellphones and home digital cameras will be elements in future clinical care. “How good does an image have to be for a doctor to be able to look at it and say, ‘I am confident. I am not worried about being sued for malpractice’?” Dr. Bauer asks. The consensus developed five years ago by the American College of Radiology was five or six megapixels. The iPhone 3G, for example, offers five megapixels. The iPhone 4 will be even higher quality at 9.2 megapixels.

It appears that technology is ahead of most physicians, but by 2015 Dr. Bauer expects that most primary care physicians will handle a third of their practice via telemedicine and will need to summon only about a tenth of that population for an office visit. That means an initial 33% reduction in patient driving and subsequent pollution as well as a reduction in the number of square feet you need in your office. “Physicians can actually look at a pretty dramatic reduction in their office expenses by using these technologies,” he says.