



**BY PHIL SASSO**  
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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# Going green can mean saving green

How ecological choices can be economical choices

**Is your business practicing sustainability?**

Sustainability is *meeting today's needs without affecting tomorrow's generation*. It's mostly about being "green." Big businesses like Walmart and McDonald's have lofty sustainability plans that they brag about in their marketing. It's harder for a one-man store to have a formal sustainability plan – much less get any marketing mileage from it.

Being sustainable might not impact your sales, but it can impact your bottom line by saving you money. And it can give you a warm fuzzy feeling that you're leaving the world a better place for those to come.

In honor of Earth Day on April 22, here are ways to reduce our carbon footprints...

That means a family of four creates over three tons of trash in a year. So, reducing one family's landfill waste by as little as one third can literally make a ton of difference. Image if that was an entire city.

A mobile tool business probably produces more trash than the average person just in boxes, packaging and paperwork. It also consumes more fuel and creates more emissions. That all adds up to more waste in our landfills and more pollution in our air. So, doing your small part can make a big impact over time.

And some green business practices can save you a few greenbacks, too.

to tell you that fuel is a big expense in the mobile tool business. How can you conserve fuel and save cash?

- **Turn it off** – Turn your truck off when you're at a shop or get caught by a train. Also minimize miles to reduce consumption. Remap your route if needed to use less fuel and lower the mileage you put on your truck. And when restocking, keep your heater or A/C off or on low. Wearing an extra layer of clothes in winter, for example, can reduce after-hours heating costs.
- **Tune it up** – I probably don't need to tell you that a well-tuned truck wastes less fuel. Changing fluids at scheduled intervals reduces mechanical wear. Well-aligned and properly inflated tires also increase mileage and reduce tire wear. Shop owners buy from you every day. Return the favor. It's good business and can extend your truck's life, too.
- **Buy in bulk** – Buying at big-box stores and warehouse clubs can mean big savings and less waste. Large containers of supplies like paper towels tend to have less packaging. Concentrated cleaning supplies also use less packaging and less fuel to transport.
- **Lower power bills** – Today's high-efficiency lighting conserves energy. Just like a few years back when CFLs (Compact Fluorescent Lights)

**Q.** I'm a tool dealer, not a "tree hugger." What difference will going green really make?

**A.** I don't consider myself a "tree hugger," either. But I don't see how it's a bad thing to care about the world we leave our kids and grandkids. I am not a political conservationist, but my family recycles and tries to conserve where we can.

It's easy to feel one person can't make an impact. But, consider this: the average American produces 4.3 lbs of garbage a day (that's one third more trash than we each created 50 years ago).

**Q.** OK. I'll bite. Where can I start?

**A.** In grade school I learned the three Rs: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. So, let's start there. The same conservation practices that work in a home, will work on your truck.

**REDUCE:** How can you reduce the amount of waste you create or energy you consume in your business?

- **Think before you print** – Rather than print every invoice and receipt, consider emailing, texting or digitally filing / archiving. It can make tracking documents easier, save paper costs, reduce landfill waste and possibly save a tree.
- **Conserve fuel** – I don't have

**Next month's topic**  
In Phil Sasso's May column, he'll discuss how dealers can use technology to work smarter - including phone apps and websites to help run a business more efficiently.



Photo: Thinkstock

replaced power-hungry incandescent bulbs, newer LED bulbs are now replacing CFLs with ultra-low power consumption and up to a five-year lifespan. That all adds up to fewer bulbs in the landfill and bigger savings in electric and battery use.

**REUSE:** Consider ways to use things over again rather than tossing them.

- **Boxes** – Consider who could reuse your shipping boxes. When I do a big client mailing, I return my boxes to a local printer so he can reuse them.
- **Cups** – When possible, choose reusable cups over disposable ones. A pizzeria in my neighborhood gives 69-cent refills if you bring back their reusable cup. It saves the owner a few bucks, reduces waste and generates repeat business.
- **Signs and handouts** – Rather than tossing every sign you make, consider filing it away for reuse. Or use dry erase boards so you can erase and reuse your sign. Instead of printed handouts, consider emailing PDFs to customers.

**RECYCLE:** Collect and recycle whatever you can. It's easier than you think, it just takes a bit of a learning curve to get used to new habits.

- **Aluminum** – Do you sell cans of soda pop or energy drinks? Then a can crusher and collection bin can

encourage your customers to recycle. You can turn in the cans for cash at a local metal recycling center every month and make a couple of extra dollars, too.

- **Paper** – Collect your paper and cardboard waste and put it in your home recycling bin. If you create too much recycling or your community doesn't collect recycling, consider asking shop owners if you can use their recycling containers on occasion.
- **Plastic** – If you sell drinks in plastic bottles, put a recycling bin beside the cooler to collect empties. Add them to your regular recycling collection. They say one plastic bottle can take up to 500 years to decompose in a landfill. Recycling plastic can make a big impact on landfills.
- **Computers** – You may not think of computers as reusable, but many companies have popped up to refurbish and resell old electronics. Google “computer recyclers” and your zip code to find one near you.
  - **Sell** – You can drop off your old working computers, printers, monitors and accessories at these computer recyclers. Some will pay you a few bucks or give you shopping credit, some won't. But, most computer components (especially older monitors containing mercury) don't belong in trash pickup. So, in either

case, they're taking junk off your hands and giving it a second life. I noticed online that Staples stores take used computers and issue store credit (find out more online staples.com/recycle).

- **Buy** – I just bought a bunch of computer equipment from a computer recycler near me. The one I worked with thoroughly tests each item and gives a 30-day warranty. Some don't test or give a warranty, so be sure to ask questions. If you don't have a computer recycler near you, consider mail order. (Shipping on heavier items can be impractical.) In either case, remember you're buying used. It's like a used car, it's got some miles on it, may not have all the latest technology and lacks that new computer smell. But most of the stuff I've bought has served me long and well. Your experience may vary. I'm into computers. If you're not, consider asking a friend who is for help.

- **Refill** – I also buy “recycled” toner cartridges online for a fraction of the cost of new. I've had good luck and bad luck with this. But quality has come a long way. You can also buy refilled inkjet cartridges online. You can also buy refill kits. I find them messy and time consuming. I prefer letting someone else do the work and save my time.

These are a few small, practical things you can do.

Obviously there are more extreme ways to go green, like adding solar panels to your truck, retrofitting your engine to use biodiesel (and use waste fryer oil from local restaurants) or buying carbon offsets (paying a business to plant trees or something to offset your “carbon footprint”). But these ideas can cost more than they save and aren't practical for the average tool dealer.

In the end, it's about doing what you can to reduce, reuse and recycle while perhaps saving a few bucks, too. **PD**