



PRACTICE  
MANAGEMENT

## Going Green!

**Being more eco-friendly is the hot trend—  
and it's certainly something you can do in your business.**



**More and more people** are considering how they can make their homes and lifestyles more green—and we're not talking about money—though that's an additional benefit to going green. What we're talking about is being more eco-friendly. And the same changes that can be made at home can definitely be made at your eyecare practice. The effort can be something as simple as trying to reuse paper.

That's something that Benjamin Ticho, MD, an Illinois-based ophthalmologist does routinely, by using the opposite side of the paper. Of course he says this is not something to do with paper that contains patient-sensitive information, in order to remain compliant with HIPAA. Going eco-friendly could be also be as complex as making actual renovations to the office building, such as installing wind turbines to get the building off of the energy grid. No matter how little, every effort does make a difference.

The latter—installation of wind turbines—is something that Carl May, Jr., MD, of the Hanover, Pa.-based May Eye Care Center & Associates, has looked into doing at his own practice. It would certainly be a large undertaking, but it's one that has caught his attention. May has been researching ways he can make his office more eco-friendly and that was just one possibility he has taken into consideration. "We've also been looking at solar power opportunities," says May. "There are currently some good state and federal tax breaks so now is a good time to get involved with either of those efforts. We're still researching the possibilities and seeing if they're right for us."

May says he became interested in going green purely out of personal concern for the environment and the direction that this country might be headed if more people don't start caring about their use of energy. "In general I believe our whole country needs to be more energy-conscious and less dependent on foreign oil," says May. "Any little thing we can do with our businesses, to make them more energy-efficient, can make a difference."

Within the last few years, the practice has also gone completely paperless. Like any change, it took some adjustment, but May says it's been a positive effort. Beyond the obvious environmental benefits of using less paper, patients have expressed appreciation because it offers an additional level of privacy for their information. Patient records are much harder for unwarranted visitors to access than when the practice used paper charts. In addition, the medical technicians at the practice enjoy the convenience and efficiency a paperless system offers while the doctors say it increases accuracy and precision of patient charts. Over time, May also sees it as a money saver. "The cost of paper does eventually add up—plus we had cardboard folders for every patient," he says. "Now we've eliminated all that. We appreciate not having to use all of that paper. And this has streamlined everything, making us more efficient."

Recently, May Eye Care moved its practice into a new facility, which May constructed with some eco-friendly factors in mind. The office incorporates a number of massive windows that let in more natural light, along with several skylights to really maximize that advantage. "We no longer rely on so many lights," says May. "And often, if I come in on the weekend, I don't even have to turn the lights on. It's nice not to have to walk into a completely dark office building. And there's definitely a cost savings there. We've also had patients comment on the fact that they like the natural-lit areas."

All of the office rooms make use of motion sensors so that lights automatically go off when nobody is using the room. "That way if someone forgets to turn off the lights, they still go off," says May. "And when someone comes in, they automatically go on."

### Making Changes

May says that going eco-friendly doesn't have to be difficult. Some eyecare practitioners may be put off by the cost, but many of these opportunities can save money in the long run. "There are definitely upfront costs, but if you're in the practice for the long haul or are just starting out in this field, these are all important things to consider," advises May. "They will eventually pay off."

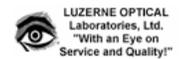
And as the public begins to embrace a more green lifestyle for themselves, they'll begin to appreciate patronizing businesses that do the same. Currently May does not market the fact that he's "going green" to his patients as he has made the efforts more for personal reasons. But there's certainly a benefit to letting patients know you care about the environment and May says he may start sharing the news with some of his patients who might appreciate the eco-friendly changes.

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Simple changes that can be made in the home are the same sort of eco-friendly changes that can be made at the office. These include switching out ordinary light bulbs for energy-efficient ones, turning off lights (or using motion sensors like May does), and using a timer thermostat in the office. The latter is another effort that Ticho says his office has used that is both energy efficient and ultimately a money-saving change. You can also encourage your employees to be more eco-friendly by reusing paper, using coffee mugs instead of Styrofoam cups, or starting a recycling program in the office. These are all very simple changes that can be incorporated easily.

There are plenty of resources online and in bookstores that can help give you ideas about how to be more energy efficient. Check out The National Geographic's Green Guide to get more information about what it takes to be more eco-friendly both at home and at the office ([www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com)). Discovery's Planet Green is another great source of information ([www.planetgreen.discovery.com](http://www.planetgreen.discovery.com)). Once you start making some simple changes and witnessing the benefits, you'll only want to consider doing more to go green.

Lindsey Getz



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