

IMPLEMENTING A CIRCULAR ECONOMY: A WORKPLACE GUIDE

By Circular Innovation
Council in
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What is “Circular Economy”

The Circular Economy (CE) is a system designed to minimize waste and make the most of Earth’s resources. By adapting Circular Economy principles, businesses can significantly reduce their environmental footprint while enhancing profitability.

This guide is tailored to help employers and employees implement these principles in both workplace settings and everyday life, ensuring sustainability and cost efficiency.



ADOPTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY INITIATIVES: FOR EMPLOYERS

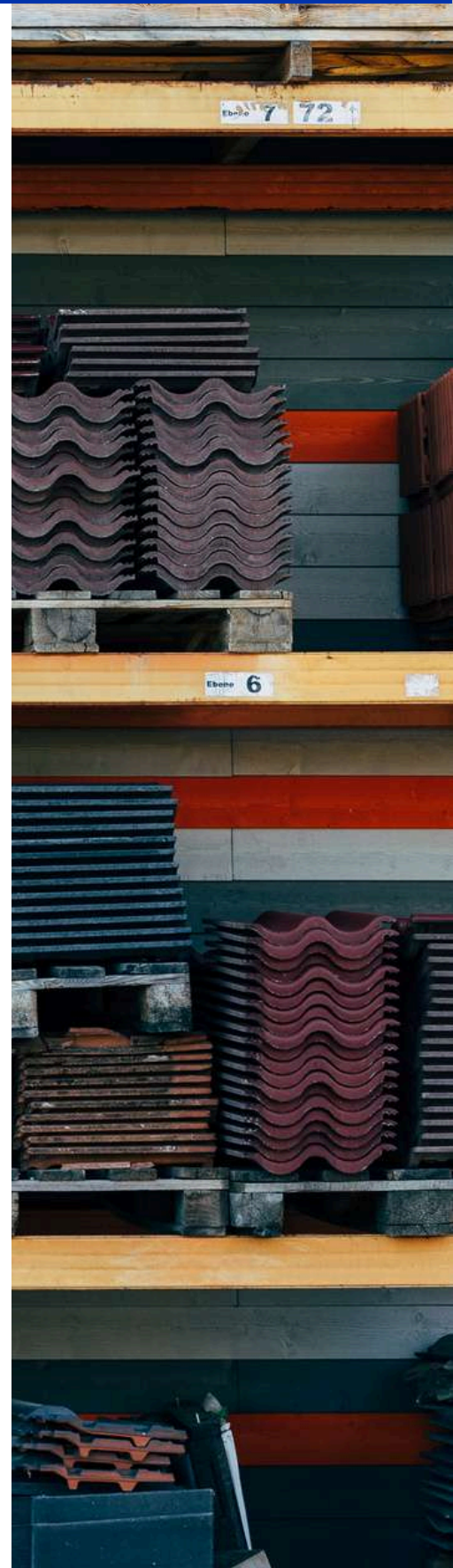
1. WASTE MINIMIZATION

Determine a baseline:

Evaluate your current waste streams. Start by auditing the types and amounts of waste your business produces, and identify areas where waste can be reduced, such as excess packaging, overstocking, or unnecessary printing. Measure your success against this baseline by conducting periodic audits.

Optimize your inventory:

Optimize inventory management to avoid overproduction and excess waste. Digital tools for stock tracking help in forecasting demand accurately.



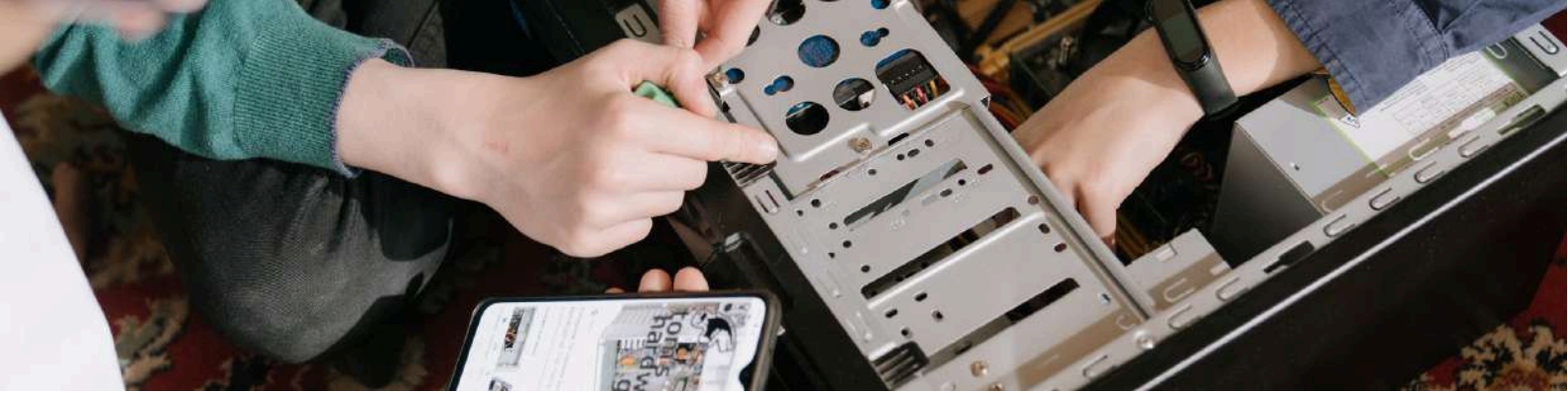


Use Recycled & Sustainable Materials:

When procuring materials, prioritize transparent suppliers who provide recycled or sustainably sourced products. Ensure that any materials you purchase can be recycled or repurposed at the end of their lifecycle. For an even bigger impact, close the loop by redesigning your material flow so end-of-life packaging and products are returned to you or the manufacturer for reuse, repurposing, or recycling.

Promote Digital Solutions:

Encourage the use of digital alternatives for paper-intensive processes such as invoicing, record-keeping, and internal communications. Moving towards a paperless environment reduces paper waste and saves costs. If paper must be used, consider purchasing recycled stock or from sustainably managed forests.



2. PRODUCT LIFE EXTENSION: REUSE & REPURPOSE

Reuse Office Equipment:

Before replacing office furniture or electronics, consider whether they can be repaired or refurbished. Also, many items can be resold or donated rather than discarded, contributing to longer product lifecycles. If you don't have the capacity to resell or donate, consider putting them on the curb with a "free" sign for passersby to take.

Repair Over Replace:

Set up a maintenance program for office equipment like printers, computers, and machinery to repair and extend their lifespan, saving on replacement costs and reducing e-waste. Partner with repair service providers to minimize downtime and keep equipment in optimal condition. Consider equipment suppliers who may offer subscription-based access-over-ownership services, whereby your subscription pays for their ongoing maintenance and use.

Offer Product Take-Back Programs:

If your business produces consumer products, implement take-back or return schemes where customers can return used items for recycling or refurbishment. This not only reduces waste but can also create a new revenue stream through resale or repurposing.

3. SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION

The National Greenhouse Gas Inventory¹ released in 2024 reports transportation as the second-highest emitter amongst economic sectors in Canada. To make a big reduction in your business' transportation emissions, consider the following.

- Purchase electric vehicles for your transportation fleet or rent them on an as-needed basis.
- Upgrade facility infrastructure: install electric chargers for fleet and employee EV use.
- Optimize transportation routes.
- Consider using technologies that calculate the most efficient route to reduce vehicle emissions.
- Support carpooling by setting up a carpool assistance program.
- Allow work-from-home where possible.
- Provide bike racks/ lockers to encourage active transportation.

The biggest reduction in transportation emissions comes from not travelling at all.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/greenhouse-gas-emissions/inventory.html>



4. SUSTAINABLE DESIGN AND INNOVATION

Design for Longevity:

For businesses in product design or manufacturing, focus on creating products that are durable, repairable, and upgradable. This increases customer satisfaction and reduces the need for frequent replacements, saving resources over time.

Circular Business Models:

Transition to models like Product-as-a-Service, where customers lease products instead of purchasing them. This allows for better control over the product lifecycle, facilitating repairs, upgrades, and eventual recycling.





5. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Training Programs:

Educate employees about circular economy principles and how they can apply them in their roles. Offer workshops, e-learning courses, or invite guest speakers to provide insights.

Recognition and Incentives:

Establish programs that reward employees who suggest or implement successful waste reduction or resource efficiency initiatives.

Circular Innovation Council can provide circular economy and employee engagement training for your business, tailored to your industry. Email Info@CircularInnovation.ca to learn more.

6. OPTIMIZE ENERGY USE

Energy-Efficient Operations:

Invest in energy-efficient technologies, such as LED lighting, efficient HVAC systems, and energy-saving office equipment.

Renewable Energy:

Explore opportunities to transition to renewable energy sources such as solar or wind power to minimize the environmental impact of business operations. While such infrastructure installation will require up front investments, it will pay off in the long run, reducing future energy bills. In many jurisdictions government subsidies are available which can greatly reduce the initial investment.



7. EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES

Zero-Waste Policies:

Create a zero-waste plan, encouraging the avoidance of single-use items and packaging. Offer alternatives like reusable packaging and incentivize staff to bring reusable containers.

Smart Waste Management:

Set up comprehensive recycling systems in the office for paper, plastic, glass, electronic waste, and organics collection. Ensure proper sorting and encourage employees to follow waste separation practices.



ADOPTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY INITIATIVES: FOR EMPLOYEES

Promote best practices at your workplace to be recognized as a circular economy champion!

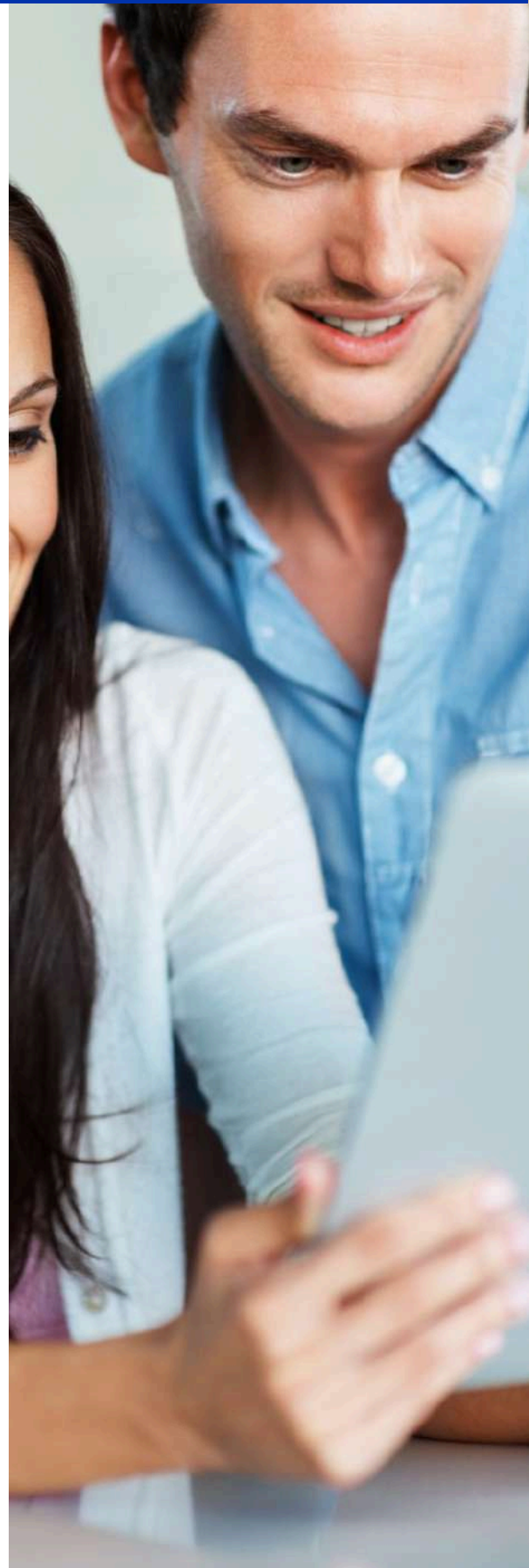
1. WASTE REDUCTION

Minimize Paper Use:

Opt for digital tools to reduce paper consumption. Use digital invoices, memos, and records. When paper is necessary, print on both sides and use recycled paper or paper from sustainably managed forests.

Avoid Single-Use Items:

Set an example for your colleagues by bringing reusables to work. The options are endless! Choose reusables that are right for your needs, and bonus points if you're able to source them from a secondhand source. Consider using reusable containers, water bottles, utensils, steel or glass straws, and cloth napkins at work. Reduce reliance on disposable coffee cups or single-use plastic items.





2. REUSE AND REPURPOSE ITEMS

Maximize Equipment Lifespan:

Use equipment and supplies for their entire lifespan and opt for repair and refurbishment services to fix what's broken. Before purchasing new, consider secondhand or refurbished products.

Creative Repurposing:

Look for ways to repurpose items that are no longer needed. For example, old boxes can be used for storage, and packaging from received parcels can be reused for outward shipping.

3. SUSTAINABLE COMMUTING

The National Greenhouse Gas Inventory released in 2024 reports transportation as the second-highest emitter amongst economic sectors in Canada. To make a big reduction in your own emissions footprint, consider the following.

- Where possible carpool, bike, or use public transportation to commute. Consider carpooling with colleagues if work is not reachable by public transit or bicycle, and advocate for management to support a carpool assistance program at work.
- Virtual Meetings: Reduce the need for business travel by utilizing video conferencing tools. This helps save costs and greatly reduces the environmental impact of all participants!



4. PARTICIPATE IN RECYCLING PROGRAMS

Follow Recycling Guidelines:

Ensure you separate recyclable materials properly following your municipal guidelines (materials that are recyclable in some municipalities may not be in others). Participate in office recycling programs for paper, glass, plastic, and e-waste.

E-Waste Collection:

When discarding electronics, donate to local initiatives that refurbish or recycle devices responsibly, or participate in company e-waste recycling programs.





5. EFFICIENT RESOURCE USE

Conserve Energy:

Turn off lights, computers, and office equipment when not in use. Use power-saving modes on computers and reduce unnecessary energy consumption by using natural light where possible. Unplug appliances and equipment when not in use to reduce “phantom energy” use.

Water Conservation:

Be mindful of water usage in the workplace. Fix leaking faucets promptly and encourage responsible water use in office kitchens and restrooms. If your workplace has a kitchen or kitchenette, turn off the tap when not immediately in use (e.g. washing reusables after break time).

6. CHANGE ADVOCACY

Be an Advocate for Change:

Employees can suggest waste reduction programs, recycling initiatives, or process improvements to management. Sharing ideas on how to make office practices more sustainable can make a big impact and help Canada shift to a circular economy.

Lead by Example:

Be an ambassador for circular economy practices by demonstrating sustainable behaviors and encouraging colleagues inside and outside your organization to adopt similar good habits.



COLLABORATION BETWEEN EMPLOYERS & EMPLOYEES: KEY TO A SUCCESSFUL CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Establish Circular Economy Goals:

Set sustainability targets that align with circular economy principles. Employers should engage employees in the goal-setting process and provide resources to make changes happen.

Foster a Circular Culture:

Create a company culture that prioritizes waste reduction and sustainability. Employers can host training sessions, provide incentives for eco-friendly initiatives, and celebrate milestones that lead to reduced waste and increased efficiency.

Support Employee-Led Initiatives:

Empower employees to propose innovative solutions to close the loop. Implement reward systems for teams or individuals who devise ways to cut costs while adhering to circular economy principles, such as reducing resource use or finding creative ways to upcycle waste.



KEY BENEFITS OF ADOPTING CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRACTICES



Cost Savings:

Adopting circular economy practices helps businesses cut costs by using fewer raw materials, reducing waste disposal fees, and lowering energy and water bills.

Enhanced Profitability:

Companies can tap into new revenue streams by refurbishing, reselling, or offering take-back programs for used products, adding value without needing extra resources.

Improved Brand Reputation:

Consumers care more about sustainability than ever. By embracing circular economy principles, businesses can attract eco-conscious customers and employees, strengthening their brand's image.

Regulatory Compliance and Risk Reduction:

As environmental laws get tougher, businesses that adopt circular business models make better use of resources will stay ahead of regulations, avoiding fines and compliance issues.

Increased Employee Engagement:

Getting employees involved in sustainability efforts not only boosts morale but also helps retain talent—especially those who want to work for a company that cares about the planet.





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