

A Greener Office- Batteries

Source: The Green Office (www.thegreenoffice.com)

Every year 15 billion batteries are sold worldwide. Though batteries make up less than one percent of the municipal solid waste stream, conventional disposable batteries account for a disproportionate amount of toxic heavy metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium, and nickel. These materials have devastating toxic effects on the environment when released through incineration or landfill seepage. With the proliferation of cordless and portable electronic products we can only expect demand for batteries to increase.

Buying Guide

Spurred by the Mercury Containing and Rechargeable Battery Management Act of 1996, the battery industry has begun to address its environmental impact. Mercury use, for example, is 98% lower in batteries than it was in the 1980's. A great way to continue the industry's movement toward green is to buy rechargeable batteries. They reduce waste without any loss in performance and will save you money over time. Choose rechargeable batteries that are recyclable and do not contain toxic heavy metals. Use the following guide when shopping:

Type	Rechargeable	Preference	Comments
Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH) Lithium Ion (Li-Ion)	Y	Best	These batteries are recyclable, do not contain toxic heavy metals, hold a strong charge, and can be recharged many more times than their rechargeable counterparts.
Nickel Cadmium Alkaline	Y	OK	These batteries are recyclable but contain toxic heavy metals.
Conventional Disposables	N	Avoid Where Possible	These batteries contain toxic heavy metals and can only be used once before entering the waste stream.

Best Practices

Because batteries are a portable, convenient power source they are hard to do without. The rule of thumb when it comes to practice is a slight variation on a familiar theme: reduce, recharge, and recycle. Here are some other tips:

- Use solar powered electronics such as calculators
- Consider a solar powered rechargeable-battery charger
- Plug-in electronic devices and offset carbon emissions whenever possible

