

Remote work for a greener future: Should we really return to the office?

To celebrate Earth Day (April 22nd), global employment expert Remote has explored how a remote-first work culture can contribute to green innovation and urge businesses to implement planet-first working practices, revealing five green benefits of remote work, and why getting there is a “team effort”

“In 2020, we experienced a small glimpse of how a remote-first world can positively affect our environment,” says Amanda Day, Director of People Engagement at [*Remote*](#). “A team effort between business leaders and employees is required to unlock the true potential of a remote-first business model that benefits the environment moving forward.”

Remote has revealed the potential environmental benefits of establishing a robust remote-first attitude as businesses plan for and invest in the future.

1. Eliminating daily commutes improves air quality and life-work balance

Eliminating frequent daily commutes will reduce carbon dioxide emissions and address congestion issues in some of the world's busiest cities.

Commuting travel is one of the most significant factors impacting traffic on our roads. 76% of Americans use their car to commute to and from work. In the UK, 68% of commuters travel by car or van.

Remote-first work culture aligns with global efforts to remove traffic from city centres, favouring pedestrian traffic and green space instead.

"A business committed to a remote-first culture could greatly reduce congestion and carbon dioxide emissions. Remote-first approaches such as async work practices can connect teams through online calls and messages. Fewer in-person meetings result in less need to travel," says Amanda Day.

2. Downsizing or relinquishing offices could create more green space in cities

Remote-first businesses can down-size office space, resulting in significant cost-saving with the potential for cities to reimagine underutilised commercial property.

A quarter of London-based companies are downsizing office holdings, with a further 18% opting for a coworking or flexible space instead.

As office vacancies rise across some of the world's biggest cities, can underutilised commercial properties have a new future?

"A remote-first culture could spark an evolution in urban planning that reinvigorates cities by creating additional public parks, pedestrian areas, and recreational facilities," says Amanda Day. "As businesses downsize or eliminate offices and fixed assets, this underutilised commercial space can be converted into green space or affordable homes to address housing issues."

3. 'Work from anywhere' policies could reduce population density in big cities

Remote-first allows employees to live where they want (and where they work best), meaning population density in crowded urban cities could dissipate.

If more companies take a global approach rather than centralising their operation, people won't have to live in polluted cities and can choose to live in lower-density locations.

There are recent examples of companies moving away from big cities, with Oracle and Hewlett-Packard opting to move their operation from Silicon Valley.

"As remote-first outlooks become more prevalent, an exodus from cities could be great for the environment and enable professionals to provide greater support for their home communities outside metropolitan areas," says Amanda Day.

4. Remote workers tend to be more energy efficient

Telecommuters tend to be more energy conscious and aware of the environment because they incur the expense of working from home.

Employee-focused companies should consider the financial impact remote work has on team members and provide support where possible.

Investment in green, home solar energy sources could become more appealing, with clean energy being used to power appliances throughout the day and save on bills.

"When committing to remote-first, employers have a duty to alleviate some of the financial impacts of home energy," says Amanda Day. "Any assistance provided to employees is likely far more affordable than the fixed costs of managing a commercial office. To supplement the costs of working from home, employers can provide an equipment allowance for a desk and chair, and an energy or internet payment."

5. Minimise food, plastic, and paper waste

Remote work is an opportunity to lead a revolution against the wastage of paper, food, and single-use plastics – this is a challenge for everyone!

Remote-first reduces paper usage, opting to share files and distribute information exclusively online.

A team effort to reduce wastage when remote working could save 16 trillion trees from deforestation!”

“When working from home, we should strive to dine in or use eateries with sustainable packaging and cutlery. This is a small but important challenge,” says Amanda Day. “Remote-first employees have a better opportunity to reduce waste caused by takeaway food and coffee, among other staples of a 9-5 in the office.”

Amanda Day is Director of People Engagement at Remote.

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