

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN PRACTICES AT FIRE & WATER

Environmentally sustainable product design and sustainable business practices are fundamental to Fire & Water. While it is difficult for a small company to undertake far-reaching research and development, we endeavor to constantly improve the environmental aspects of our existing products; to design new, more sustainable products; to use cutting edge energy saving technology; and to utilize wherever possible sustainable practices within our office and shop.

Materials. Most of our product lines (with the exception of two early legacy lines) are designed around sustainable and/or recycled materials. A favorite of ours, incorporated in many of our designs, is a biocomposite made of recycled newsprint and soy flour. Several of our product series make extensive use of custom recycled glass, another uses recycled plastic and yet another has shades made of sustainably harvested wood veneer. Much of the metals utilized are scrap or cutoffs from salvage shops and other metal shops (cleaned and looking new, of course).

Finishes. Almost all of our finishes are now water base and/or low VOC. We admit there are a few instances where, due to the limitations of being a small shop, we have to resort to standard (nasty) finishes, but we are close to eliminating the last of them.

Recyclability. Our products are designed to enable simple dismantling at the ends of their lives. The materials are mostly non-complex, meaning they can easily be separated and sorted for reuse. Most methods of attachment between materials are mechanical, which further enables future dismantling.

Energy use. All of our newer lighting designs can utilize energy efficient light sources. Our compact fluorescent lines have all been modified to utilize the new GU24 dedicated CFL sockets, making them eligible for Energy Star listing (we are working on that). And our newest line, cycLED, uses color changing LEDs.

Packaging. Though it is crucial that delicate items such as light fixtures be well protected during shipment, we try to minimize the impact of our packaging. We use a combination of reclaimed, recycled and, at times, virgin packing materials. (We experimented with using corn starch packing peanuts but had a rodent problem!) Please try to reuse or recycle the packaging materials when you receive our products. Most local shipping stores will accept bagged peanuts if you can't reuse them yourself.

Office practices. Aside from practicing basic recycling and cutting down on office paper by, for instance, receiving all faxes into our computers rather than fax printers, our major environmental push has involved our catalogs. We emphasize the use of our online catalogs and individual pages, and when printed catalogs are requested, we print them entirely in-house. This enables us to print on demand which means that (A) we can minimize back stock and waste and (B) we can change or add to the catalogs at will without worrying about stock of outdated catalogs. We also have greater control over the paper utilized (all recycled, of course) and the printing process. We use a solid ink color printer which gives us laser quality utilizing waxlike sticks of color inks. These are non-toxic and require minimal packaging, unlike inkjet and laser cartridges.

We utilize non-toxic cleansers and collect compostable food scraps which are taken to local community gardens. (We don't have space to do our own composting unfortunately.) Our energy is purchased through ConEd Solutions, which provides a mix of 100% hydro and wind power.

Fire & Water founder and owner David Bergman teaches, writes and lectures on eco-design.

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