

It's Easy Being Green

How to become the eco-friendly fitness professional

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As consumers look to personal and group fitness instructors as role models for planet-minded wellness, the growing concern for taking care of the environment continues to form part of this responsibility. Club managers, instructors and trainers alike share "going green" responsibilities of maximizing the three greening "R"s: reduce, reuse and recycle. This article explores some of the specific, immediate ways that the fitness industry can incorporate "greening" into daily work practice.

Figure 1 clearly shows that our planet over-consumes its resources. World population increase combined with the rise of global warming, an increase in the contamination of the seas and fish, an increase in the concentration of acid rain, and growing reported incidents of related disease like asthma in children, all serve as the canaries in the coal mine calling the fitness industry to rise to the occasion and make a difference.

FIGURE 1

YEAR	APPROXIMATE POPULATION
1800	1 billion: the ideal sustainable ecological maximum for our planet
1930	2 billion
1960	3 billion
2008	6.4 billion

SOURCE: CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION, CDC.GOV



INSIDE THE CLUB

Club managers can put their finger on the pulse of greening if they consider how one makes similar initiatives in his or her own home. Of course, recycling in all departments is the place to begin. In addition, showers should be outfitted with water-saving showerheads and on-demand hot water heaters, which make instant hot water for individual showerheads. All electrical appliances, such as washers, driers and computers, should be connected to smart-strips—power strips that regulate energy and reduce electrical consumption when units are turned off but still plugged in. Locker rooms and offices should utilize motion sensor light switches that illuminate their respective areas only when occupied.

In the cardio-theater area, televisions should be set up to be on only when guests are using equipment. Holmes Place clubs throughout Europe provide guests the opportunity to activate specific television sets on demand. If cardio equipment in any area remains deactivated for five minutes or longer, all television and sound systems in those areas automatically deactivate until turned on manually.

When laundering items like towels, choose greener brands of new "high efficiency" detergent and fabric softeners bearing the new "HE" label and wash in cooler temperatures wherever possible. When purchasing new electrical equipment, choose appliances with the EPA's Energy Star rating (logo pictured in Figure 2) that consume less energy and decrease electrical bills. Wherever possible, replace light bulbs with the "CFL" bulbs that earned the Energy Star to reduce energy consumption. For more information, visit www.energystar.gov.

FIGURE 2



Printing in the facility should employ post-consumer recycled paper. Electronic schedules, brochures and descriptions displayed on the Internet, instead of paper printing, are quickly

becoming the norm for large fitness chains. For areas that incorporate aromatherapy, water diffusers provide more environmentally friendly options than incense and scented candles by not releasing smoke and other chemicals into the environment.

Many facilities today offer food and beverage areas like juice bars and restaurants. Some greener approaches include using recycled and biodegradable material in printed matter and to-go packaging. Bags made of corn fibers often replace nondegradable plastic bags. Clubs show an eco-consciousness when they offer menus including options that support the slow-food movement; locally sourced, organic and sustainable seafood choices; and fair-trade options for chocolate, tea and coffee. Figure 3 lists Web sites offering further information on greening, and the first 10 sites detail greener approaches with food.

FIGURE 3	
✦ eco-indextourism.org	✦ eco-label.com
✦ foodandwaterwatch.org	✦ nature.org
✦ thinkgreen.com	✦ nrc-recycle.org/ localresources.aspx
✦ verifysustainability.com	✦ mbayaq.org/cr/ seafoodwatch.asp
✦ garden.org	✦ cspinet.org/eatinggreen/ index.html
✦ slowfoodusa.org	✦ mygreentravels.com
✦ carbonfootprint.com	✦ greenglobe.org
✦ organicconsumers.org	✦ usgbc.org
✦ footprintnetwork.org	✦ carbonneutral.com
✦ treehugger.com	✦ ucsusa.org

Finally, when evaluating staff, providing green typed and e-mailed evaluations shows environmental consciousness.

PERSONAL TRAINERS

Personal trainers are perhaps the most visible of all club employees on a daily basis, so they truly set examples on many levels. Trainers can display a green consciousness in several ways. Recycled water bottles are a better choice than purchasing bottles on a daily basis. Greener products include choices at nalgene-outdoor.com and thegreenguide.com. Most fitness professionals today tend to avoid choosing plastics altogether in favor of stainless steel bottles. Read more at thinkoutsidethebottle.org.

Trainers should take a green approach to prescribing and using fitness equipment by minimizing the use of electrical-based machine training. Since outdoor training tends to focus on human effort and natural light, it is perhaps the greenest approach to training for cardiovascular, flexibility and closed-chain bodyweight exercises. When carrying personal equipment to and from the club, consider using backpacks made of recyclable material able to harness solar power to charge electrics contained within (cellphones, PDAs, laptops), available from sources such as voltaicsystems.com and noonsolar.com.

Trainers can save paper by using cellphones and other portable

devices when tracking client progress. Not only does this preserve more trees, but it also allows trainers to manipulate data on a computer, including forwarding progress, follow-up and feedback directly to clients via paperless e-mails.

GROUP FITNESS

Music of all kinds can serve as a significant point of departure for a green approach. Downloadable music provides instant gratification without nongreen plastic cases, shrink-wrap and even postage. Options such as dynamixmusic.com and clickmix.com allow instructors to choose their own tracks, beats per minute, and organization to download a complete playlist almost instantly to a computer or iPod.

Other options exist beyond music. Mind-body instructors can choose natural, degradable mats at huggermugger.com. Ultralighttowels.com offers degradable, compact and efficient towels for on-the-go fitness instructors who regularly use different towels at different facilities. When washing fitness clothes at home, exercise the same greener practices for laundry described above. Deborah Puskarich, group fitness director of Dr. Kenneth Cooper's Aerobic Center at Craig Ranch, takes an eco approach to group fitness once monthly in which a class works out with no music, no lighting and no microphone, thus saving on equipment wear-and-tear and electricity. As a result, the only energy generated is entirely human.

AROUND THE WORLD

Fitness facilities around the globe are making progress toward implementing greener practices. In the Philippines, Gold's Gym® chains reduce laundry and towels in locker rooms by offering standing "Body Blower" machines after showers to dry clients with warm air. In Japan, Athlie Fitness Clubs offer parking areas for bicycles, encouraging all guests to use bicycles and do their cardiovascular workouts coming to the gym. In the United Kingdom, a country with heavy rainfall, clubs like Virgin Active are using the British Airways precedent at their new Terminal 5 by capturing rainwater on the roofs and filtering it for use in sinks, showers and toilets. Finally, and most excitingly, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Club Watt has developed the technology to capture the energy generated by people using electronic cardiovascular equipment like treadmills, stair steppers, and even group cycling classes. Energy is routed to, and captured on, rechargeable batteries, and this in turn fuels the gym's electrical needs for the following day.

IN CONCLUSION

Greening the world has many implications for the fitness environment. The ideas above serve as just a start for applying more environmentally self-aware aspects of fitness for managers, trainers and instructors. If we want a truly green approach to running our fitness business—something we have never had—we have to start doing what we have never done.

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Lawrence Biscontini, MA, is a contributing author for *American Fitness*. He has won Instructor of the Year Awards from ACE (2002), IDEA (2004), Can Fit Pro (Specialty, 2004) and Best Mind-Body Presenter (ECA, 2005). Lawrence works as a trainer and wellness and spa consultant for his company FG2000, as well as AFAA, Reebok, Resistaball® International and Gliding, and has created Yo-Chi®. His newest book is *Running the Show: Excellence in Customer Service for Fitness*. Find Lawrence at findLawrence.com!