

# SPECIFYING GREEN

## 8 Considerations for Maximum Sustainability

Once the domain of tree-huggers and whale-lovers, green has gone mainstream. Environmental consciousness has permeated modern life. It's on our dinner tables (global organic food and drink sales topped \$50 billion in 2008<sup>1</sup>), in our closets (a burgeoning eco-fashion industry is finding its place on catwalks<sup>2</sup>), and on our TVs (Discovery has launched the first 24-hour eco-lifestyle channel<sup>3</sup>). Even the language we speak is becoming more eco-centric—environmental jargon dominated the list of new words added to the latest edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.<sup>4</sup>

Despite our increasing awareness of environmental issues and growing appetites for eco-friendly products, our understanding of green initiatives and their effects is generally incomplete. In the contract furniture industry, sustainable missions among manufacturers are a given and products marketed as “green” are widely available, but some solutions are more planet-friendly than others, and it can be tough to cut through the greenwashing.



# IT PAYS TO BE GREEN

These days, it's not only responsible, but also fashionable to be—and buy—green. A 2009 survey finds that 70% of Americans say they're paying attention to what companies are doing with regard to the environment today, even if they cannot buy until the future.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to corporate purchasing, a 2008 survey shows 89% of procurement professionals in the United States and Canada do include environmental-performance considerations when making purchasing decisions, and at least 83% of spending by respondents was green-influenced.<sup>6</sup>

In the contract furniture industry, the appeal for green runs even deeper. The ability for organizations to reap valuable state and local incentives through the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ makes environmentally conscious product choices particularly important. This has led to fierce competition among manufacturers, especially in the realm of sustainable seating.



Virtually all Humanscale products can be integral to the achievement of a number of LEED-CI, -NC and -EB credits, including points for a comprehensive ergonomics program.



# CHOOSING THE GREENEST GREEN: 8 FACTORS

Honest sustainability infuses every step of product design—it cannot be effectively “retrofitted” once a beautiful visual aesthetic has been achieved. Environmental goals must be in place throughout the inception and design process, extend to manufacturing and distribution practices, and apply to end-of-life options for a spent product.

Here are eight important factors to consider when choosing contract furniture for maximum sustainability:



**PRODUCT WEIGHT** — Products that weigh less require less raw material to create and consume fewer natural resources than comparable, heavier products. The energy and fuel required to transport products can also be reduced by lighter-weight products.



**NUMBER OF PARTS** — Products designed for both maximum function and simplicity will, by their very nature, require as few parts as possible. Fewer parts mean fewer manufacturing processes, less shipping, and less packaging, all of which save energy and carbon emissions. Fewer parts also result in greater product reliability (see #7).



**RECYCLED AND RECYCLABLE CONTENT** — While recyclability is often a hallmark of a green product, use of recycled materials is a better sign of an earth-conscious manufacturer. Select products that contain both recycled and recyclable content for maximum sustainability.



**ALUMINUM COMPONENTS** — The use of lightweight aluminum signifies quality as well as green characteristics. Aluminum never degrades, so it can be recycled infinitely, and because recyclers are paid a premium for aluminum scrap, the likelihood that a product containing aluminum will be recycled is higher than it is for products made of less valuable components like recyclable plastic.



The Diffrient World chair weighs just 25 pounds and contains just 80 parts. Other high-end task chairs weigh more than twice as much—and contain roughly triple the number of parts.



The Liberty Side chair is made primarily of aluminum. It contains 81% recycled content and is 99% recyclable.



**EASE OF DISASSEMBLY AND UPGRADEABILITY—**

Products designed for quick and simple disassembly are more likely to be recycled than those that are difficult to take apart.

And products that can be easily upgraded in the field—for instance, the replacement of spent cushions on task seating—enable longer product life. This, in turn, limits the waste that would be generated by the disposal of used products as well as the resources that would be required to replace products in their entirety.



**DISTRIBUTION PRACTICES** — Products and packaging designed to use the fewest and smallest boxes possible not only reduce waste, but allow more items to fit on delivery trucks to cut back on emissions and fossil fuels. Packaging should be eliminated entirely whenever feasible.



**QUALITY AND DURABILITY** — Quality counts when it comes to sustainability. Long-lasting, high-performance products require replacement less frequently than lower-quality choices, reducing the impact of disposal and replacement.



**ADDITIONAL GREEN PRACTICES** — Manufacturers can lead by example by utilizing green vendors themselves—such as using printers certified by the Forest Stewardship Council to create marketing materials—and by supporting environmental causes and reputable organizations.

Humanscale chairs are modular for easy replacement of worn-out parts. They ship either blanket-wrapped—eliminating wasteful packaging—or in two easy-to-assemble pieces to accommodate smaller boxes and more efficient shipping.



Through a World Wildlife Fund sponsorship, Humanscale finances patrols in eastern Cambodia to help protect 1.5 million acres of pristine wilderness from illegal poachers and loggers.

# THE IMPACT OF “GREENER” GREEN

While the decision to choose one sustainable product over another may have little to no affect on a project’s ability to achieve LEED certification, the long-term impact on the environment—especially in the case of sizable installations—can be significant. Through careful, objective evaluation, it is possible to identify products designed for maximum sustainability and function, and support the worthwhile companies that make them possible.

Good design achieves more with less—especially when it comes to our Earth’s limited resources. At Humanscale, environmental sustainability is integral to every step of product development to complement function, quality, and aesthetics for tools that provide maximum ergonomic comfort with minimal environmental stress.

The Liberty task chair is among the many Humanscale products installed at USGBC’s Platinum LEED-certified headquarters.



<sup>1</sup>organic-world.net, “Global Organic Sales Reach Almost 51 Billion US dollars in 2008,” March 2010, [http://www.organic-world.net/35.html?&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=262](http://www.organic-world.net/35.html?&no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=262) (accessed May 5, 2010).

<sup>2</sup>The Huffington Post, “New York Fashion Week Greenshows: Eco Fashion for Fall/Winter 2010,” February 19, 2010, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/starre-vartan/new-york-fashion-week-gre\\_b\\_469180.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/starre-vartan/new-york-fashion-week-gre_b_469180.html) (accessed May 5, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>Planet Green, “About Planet Green,” July 14, 2008, <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/about.html> (accessed May 13, 2010).

<sup>4</sup>Associated Press, “Green Jargon Dominates New Dictionary Entries,” September 26, 2007, <http://www.kwwl.com/News/index.php?ID=15338> (accessed October 3, 2007).

<sup>5</sup>Cone, “Cone Releases 2009 Consumer Environmental Survey,” February 18, 2009, <http://www.coneinc.com/content2032> (accessed May 13, 2010).

<sup>6</sup>TerraChoice Environmental Marketing Inc., “EcoMarkets 2008 Summary Report,” July 2008.

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