

10 Tips for Greening Your 5S Workplace Organization Event

1) Include ES&H representatives

Invite a representative from your Environment, Safety and Health (ES&H) organization (or an expert on waste that you know) to participate in the event, or have them check-in frequently if they can't attend the entire time. They are the experts on procedures and regulations that need to be followed, and can share best practices from other parts of the company.

2) Use safe cleaning supplies

Make sure you use natural or environmentally friendly cleaning supplies and products, that have little to no volatile organic compounds (VOC) emissions. Especially during an event, there are a lot of people cleaning all at the same time, which is probably more than normal. If alternative chemicals are not available, make sure gloves and masks are worn. Encourage your cleaning crew or maintenance to use these safer products as well during their regular cleaning.

3) Avoid disposable towels and wipes

Use old rags and cloth wipes, that can be cleaned and reused, instead of paper towels and cleaning wipes, that will end up in the landfill.

4) Isolate the trash before removal

Set the trash aside in its own designated area, don't just put it in a dumpster and get rid of it. This staging area offers others (not directly involved in the event) a chance to see what is going to be removed, so they can make a case for why it should be saved, or put into storage. There are many horror stories of 5S events throwing out very important items, because the right people weren't involved in the decision making.

In addition, we recommend taking the time to perform a waste audit on the trash, to understand where the items came from, how to avoid them in the future, and decide if there are other options to deal with them besides sending to the landfill. Make sure all recyclable items have been removed. We recommend using the following waste pyramid diagram to help you evaluate what can be done (note that disposal into the landfill is the last option).

5) Use eco-friendly tape to outline and mark off designated areas

For everything to have its place, tape is used often to mark areas around desks, equipment, storage, walkways, and keep-out areas.

6) Implement a yellow tag system

Yellow tagging is similar to red tagging (identifying items that need to be removed from the area), but they are used to help identify items that may be harmful to human health or the environment in the work area, that may require further investigation. Items such as a smelly whiteboard marker, a toxic or dangerous cleaning chemical for a machine, or a chemical that requires protective equipment (gloves and masks) when handling. Perhaps the item can be reduced or removed completely. Maybe there is an alternative option. Ask your ES&H representative, the supplier of the item, or other departments or companies how they deal with similar concerns.

7) Laminate documents and papers

To avoid re-printing and using extra paper, consider laminating frequently used papers and documents to protect from damage, and reuse at a later time. Examples include: red tags (ready for disposal), yellow tags (hazardous items), 5S checklist, labels, and signs.

8) Use light and low-toxic paints

When putting on a fresh coat of paint on walls and floors, use low-toxic and low VOC emission paint suppliers, and select white or a light colors, which can help save lighting and energy costs.

9) Ask around before ordering new

Before ordering new shelving or storage containers, ask other areas or departments if they have something that will do the job. As a last resort, if you need to order something brand new, consider products that are made from recycled content. We recommend creating a very simple device from scrap paper or material, to make sure it will do the job, before spending money on a permanent solution.

10) Mark and properly label waste streams

Use different colored containers for hazardous waste, recycling, and other non-hazardous wastes to make sure differences are obvious to everyone who comes into the area. Mark aerosol cans with colored dots to indicate where to dispose of them when empty.

