



The Facility Manager's Guide to the Circular Workplace

Prepared exclusively
for IFMA members by



Executive Summary

Circularity is a growing corporate priority, with 60% of Fortune 100 companies highlighting it in their sustainability reports. Reducing waste and reusing materials is becoming a key business strategy for companies aiming to be more environmentally responsible.

Collaboration is essential for circular success. Facility managers must work with corporate real estate professionals, architects, designers, and workplace strategists to design flexible, efficient spaces that reduce waste and extend the life of resources.

Office interiors have a significant carbon impact. Frequent office refreshes mean that furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) can contribute as much to a building's carbon footprint as the structure itself, according to a growing number of whole-building life cycle analyses. Including FFE in lifecycle assessments is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of emissions sources.

Design for adaptability and longevity. By creating modular, flexible workspaces and planning for end-of-life at the beginning, companies can reduce waste from constant office overhauls and make better use of their resources over time.

Circularity delivers real business benefits. It not only helps companies lower costs and meet sustainability goals but also aligns with the values of today's employees, making it a smart strategy for boosting both operational efficiency and workforce engagement.

Circular Workplace, n.

a.
A place of work that designs out waste, circulates furniture, fixtures, and equipment at their highest value, and regenerates the natural and built environment.

b.
A global coalition to raise awareness of the zero-waste office. Founded in 2023 by [Green Standards](#), our membership includes hundreds of workplace professionals across ten industries and three continents.

c.
A way of working that exists, today, in real life! And the people in this report will tell you how they're making it happen.

Why workplace circularity matters

A circular workplace is a zero-waste office — but it's also something much bigger than that. It's a growing global movement to bring the principles of the circular economy into the spaces and places where the economy happens.

In the year since [Green Standards](#) published our first [Circular Workplace](#) report, the members of this coalition have spoken on panels, run workshops, conducted interviews, advised policy makers, and done the hard work to ensure the stuff in our offices stays in use and out of landfill. And the one thing we keep coming back to is this: Collaboration.

There is no such thing as a circular economy of one. Everyone in the modern workplace needs to know that circularity is a proven way to save money, resources, and carbon emissions. The **workplace strategist** needs insight into how the **furniture manufacturer** facilitates reuse and repair, while the **corporate real estate professional** must identify an **architect** who considers end-of-use planning from the outset.

At the center of so much of the modern workplace is the **facility manager**. You hold the keys to the castle, overseeing the maintenance and operations of buildings and grounds to ensure they run smoothly. You also coordinate with vendors and contractors to handle equipment, renovations, and upgrades efficiently. FMs keep things running, and that's why you're ideally positioned to make things run in circles.

To enable a true circular workplace, it will take all these individuals working more collaboratively with each other. No one company, team or individual can do this alone.

The following pages are an adapted excerpt of our [Who's Who in the Circular Workplace](#) report. For us, circularity is not an academic model or an interesting theory; it's how the biggest companies on the planet support local non-profits, optimize their real estate portfolios, and meet their sustainability targets. They're doing it today. This guide aims to show how facility managers can be a driving force for the circular workplace.

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The relationship
of circularity
to sustainability
is that of means
to ends. Circularity
is the means
to achieve
sustainability
goals.

– Gary Miciunas

How do we claim circularity as a key part of the facility manager portfolio?

We all know that facility managers are the people who get the work done. So if we want to make workplace circularity happen, we need to put them in charge.

Facility managers have a unique vantage point: they oversee the physical space, manage resources, and ensure smooth operations. This makes them essential drivers of circularity, from reducing waste to extending the lifecycle of furniture and equipment.

To quote from the International Facility Management Association's Circular FM report:
"The facility management industry inherently embodies circular economy principles through its core activities of maintaining and repairing assets, thereby prolonging their life cycles and reducing waste."

It starts by **rethinking procurement**. Facility managers can prioritize sourcing furniture and fixtures that are modular, repairable, and recyclable. Partnering with suppliers who offer take-back programs ensures that when a product reaches the end of its useful life, it doesn't end up in a landfill but gets refurbished or repurposed.

In terms of design, facility managers can **champion flexible, long-lasting solutions**. By selecting modular systems that adapt to changing needs, they not only reduce the frequency of replacements but also minimize the waste generated by workplace updates. Circular design is about thinking long-term, and no one is better positioned to lead this effort than those responsible for managing these assets day in and day out.

Advocate for responsible end-of-life policies. The landfill should be a last resort, and everyone needs to know that. No one acts on an afterthought, so it's up to FMs to make holistic thinking the company standard.

Education and engagement are also crucial. Facility managers can **raise awareness among employees and leadership**, demonstrating how circularity supports both sustainability and cost-efficiency. They are the link between vision and execution, capable of turning circular ideals into practical actions.

And of course, do it all like an FM: Methodically, meticulously, and in the real world. "Ensure you start the effort by reviewing your operations in a holistic way, where you fully account for all of your inputs and outputs," advises Bobby LaRon of CBRE. "Run a pilot program with clearly defined success parameters that you can replicate or scale once success has been proved with metrics."

At the heart of workplace circularity is the facility manager's ability to **act as a connector**—between suppliers, recyclers, and corporate sustainability goals. With their hands on the operational pulse, they are the key to making circularity a central part of how large organizations function. If we want lasting change, facility managers need to lead the way.

What Facility Managers Can Do

Establish a network of service providers for repairs, refurbishment, and sustainable decommissioning to support office changes at an enterprise level.

Collaborate with your network to create a clear business case, including return on investment, case studies, or pilot programs.

Assess your existing inventory and plan for future needs during office transitions to align with circularity goals.

Enhance energy performance by retrofitting buildings, maintaining systems, and using renewable energy to reduce resource consumption and operational costs.

Educate teams like finance or corporate real estate on the benefits of circularity to gain broader support and understanding.

Key Voices

“Circular FM involves more than managing facilities in use. It must encompass upstream design and downstream end markets such as decommissioning, deconstructing and disassembly for material recovery.”

– **Gary Miciunas, Principal, ChiefCircularityOfficer.com, Denver**

“Reuse and reconfiguration of commercial furniture has a 10-fold impact on reducing carbon footprint over all other building materials combined.”

– **Dianne Murata, Principal Designer and Owner, Kimiko Designs, Houston**

“Ever think about what happens to equipment removed by 3rd party contractors? Right, no one does. It will often end up in landfills or the worst types of recycling programs. Require proof of reuse or repurposing as part of the contract terms.”

– **Dean Stanberry, Immediate Past Chair, IFMA Global Board of Directors, Denver**

“Too often, decisions on furnishings are made at the last minute and rushed, leading to liquidation. By planning ahead, you can save hundreds of thousands of dollars with circular solutions for future workplace needs.”

– **Lance Amato, Head of Customer Experience, CANOA, New York**

“Before considering recycling or disposal, assess all end-of-life technology for potential refurbishment. Partner with certified refurbishers (like Human-I-T) to extend the lifecycle of devices, which can then be redistributed or reused within the company.”

– **Tori Lowe, Manager of Business Development, Human-I-T, Long Beach, California**

“Instead of asking a designer “What can we do with this space?”, ask them “What can we save from this space?”. That’s what really good design can do. Reduce your embodied carbon by re-using your stuff.”

– **Jon Strassner, Strategic Advisor, Jon Strassner Consulting, Hartford**

“Use data. Whether in the public or private sector, your leadership likely wants to see data to back up your proposed initiatives. You might notice X is a problem, but when you can gather data to quantify how much X is a problem, your manager is more likely to get on board.”

– **Maddie Morgan, Circular Economy Program Manager, City of Austin, Austin**

“In a zero-waste office, minimizing what comes into the office can help minimize what must be reused or recycled later. Keeping good inventory can help eliminate unnecessary or excessive ordering. Setting up an office with zero single-use packaging needs will eliminate the need to deal with the packaging later. Architects or facilities managers can design the flow of materials so that recycling is easy and obvious. The Iron Mountain Real Estate team uses our internal Clean Start program to conduct a thorough walk-through of our facilities and provide insight and recommendations that support zero-waste and our organization’s overarching sustainability goals.”

– **Erin Gately, Circular Economy Manager, Iron Mountain, Portland, Oregon**

1. Adopt Circular Design Principles: Facility managers should prioritize use of assets that facilitate disassembly, adaptability and reuse. This includes selecting durable, recyclable materials and designing for adaptability and flexibility.

2. Transform Business Models: Encourage leaders to shift from traditional ownership models to service-oriented models, such as product-as-a-service or leasing arrangements. This transformation can drive more sustainable resource use and long-term economic benefits.

3. Leverage Technology for Data Management: Utilize digital tools and platforms to track resource use, manage building information and optimize circular economy practices. Accurate data is crucial for informed decision-making and reporting. All of this should be achieved while remaining risk averse and knowledgeable of cyber security.

– **Matt Tucker, Director of Research, IFMA, Liverpool, UK.**

Going Further

What have we missed? Share your perspective, join our coalition, and help your peers at circularsurvey.com

Read about the roles of architects, designers, workplace strategists, furniture manufacturers and more in the full *Who's Who in the Circular Workplace* report at circularworkplace.com

Who we are

Green Standards is a global sustainable decommissioning firm that captures value in workplace change. As an enterprise-level partner to the world's largest organizations, we efficiently and ethically redistribute furniture, fixtures, and equipment through charitable donation, resale, and recycling. To date, Green Standards has kept more than 125,000 tons out of landfill, maintaining a 98.6% landfill diversion rate across more than 2,000 projects. We have helped clients donate more than \$40M worth of independently appraised furniture, fixtures, and equipment to non-profits and schools in their communities.



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To date, Green Standards has completed projects in more than 40 countries.



Certified



This company meets high standards of social and environmental impact.

Corporation

Green Standards is a Certified B Corporation, which means we are committed to high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. This report is part of our commitment to building an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economic system.



Illustrations by Yarek Waszul