**Small steps towards becoming carbon neutral**

Healthcare generates an almost ludicrous amount of paper-based information including documents, images, medical notes and patient records, as well as policies, reports and regulatory documents. Paper, duplicated information and monumental resource consumption are endemic in healthcare.

Storing and managing years of paper-based information takes a lot of energy and space, as well hard costs too. The NHS is about the only remaining consumer of fax paper in the UK, despite a campaign to “axe the fax” which ran from 2018 to 2020.

Some of these issues aren’t just relevant for healthcare though, so many other areas of day-to-day business life relies on forms, record keeping and regular use of consumables like printer ink, stationery, cleaning supplies and water cups.

All these issues are compounded in the world of occupational health, a specialist area of healthcare mostly focusses on supporting businesses. Our business, [Occupational Health Assessment Ltd](https://occupationalhealthassessment.com/), was not alone in having a very traditional approach to business.

Signed paper forms were used in just about every area of practice; registration, consent, notes, reports. The volume of paper and printer ink used was ever-increasing.

Although we wanted to reduce our environmental impact, inertia was spread throughout the business and in hindsight the idea of changing our practices was perhaps more difficult than committing to take action.

The first wave of the pandemic forced our hand. Overnight we had to ditch being in a clinical environment. That gave us an opportunity to change the business for good and it’s an opportunity we seized.

The entire business is now paper-free. We no longer have printers, so we’re not consuming resources every week. We no longer use paper, which has axed our waste collection costs too. Everything is e-signed, which is quicker for doctors, nurses and patients.

We went so far so quickly that we turned our attention to our offices too. Packets of snacks have been ditched in return for refillable containers. We’ve ditched single-use plastics. Every team member has a re-fillable water bottle, we provide them as gifts for guests too, so we no longer use disposable cups.

Last year we sought external validation of the steps we’d taken, so we could demonstrate our commitment to sustainable operations. The business became certified as carbon neutral, through a short and [easy programme](https://occupationalhealthassessment.com/2021/11/12/carbon-neutral-certified/). We now contribute to a tree-planting programme every month.

Although covid has turned our lives upside down, we do credit it with forcing us to adapt and improve our business. Hopefully the small steps we’ve taken may help add up to a bigger impact in years to come.