

# “GO GREEN” WITH SUSTAINABLE SEATING

“Going green” means different things to different people. And businesses. There’s no question though, with sky high gas prices and concerns over climate change and air quality, that sustainability is a trend that’s here to stay.

This trend was underlined in a recent survey of 2,500 business professionals: over 50% of all respondents were interested in making their offices “greener.”

For manufacturers of office seating, there’s the question of what sustainable means. With [tens of thousands] of office chairs sold in the USA annually, manufacturers have to think about creating furniture that won’t degrade indoor air quality. They also need to think about the life cycle of their seating: what happens when the chair breaks down? Can it be repaired or recycled?

Some 37 manufacturers of more than 1,100 office chairs—including some of the most widely sold and respected names such as Herman Miller—have sought and received certification by the

[GREENGUARD Environmental Institute](#) (GEI) Certification Program for Low Emitting Products. Certification warrants that such products have been tested by this industry-independent, non-profit organization and found to meet or exceed the general product emission standards established by the State of Washington as well as the office furniture emission standard established by the US Environmental Protection Agency for their Headquarters Project.

GREENGUARD-certified products and materials are listed in the free GREENGUARD Online Product Guide. GEI tests the products regularly to ensure that their chemical and article emissions meet acceptable indoor air quality (IAQ) pollutant guidelines and standards. The certification is a valuable tool for architects, designers, product specifiers, purchasing organizations and consumers concerned about low-emitting products for indoor environments.

Of course, low VOCs are not the end of the chair’s sustainability cycle. Once a chair is in use, things happen—it becomes wobbly, or balky about going up or down; it may lose a wheel or need scratches or worn armrests attended to. What then? While lower-end seating may still end up in the dump when repair is needed, many parts can be recycled. A whole new industry is growing up to address these issues, especially at the pricier end of the market.

Some major players in the office furniture game, Herman Miller and Steelcase (whose Aeron and Leap chairs respectively account for over 20 million chairs sold in the marketplace to date) have formed a collaboration with the online company ChairMD.com to repair their chairs, many of which are still under warranty. These chairs often retail for over \$900 and are an investment that can last for over 20 years when properly maintained. This prolongs their lifetime with the original purchaser as well as subsequent purchasers, cutting down on the waste stream.

Another market that’s sprouted up is the recycling of the office chairs themselves. You need only go online and type in “refurbished office seating” or such to have dozens of used office furnishings sites pop up. Especially for higher-end chairs, liquidations and bankruptcies have bred an active secondary resale market.

For example, savvy consumers can now find Herman Miller’s popular Aeron chair in a pre-owned but entirely refurbished condition at [PreownedAerons.com](#). “It’s certified by Herman Miller and virtually indistinguishable from brand-new”, according to Marc Levin, founder and CEO of Home Office Solutions, the nation’s biggest online retailer of Herman Miller and Steelcase products, which launched the site this past April with Herman Miller’s authorization.

In Levin’s view, the increased demand for reusing and recycling top end office products such as the Aeron chair is driven as much by an enhanced green consciousness as a desire to economize.

With their increased emphasis on low emissions, recycling and reuse, office seating manufacturers are indeed partnering with their customers to help create a healthier, greener office environment and give real meaning to sustainability.

*Amy Falk is the founder of Falk Associates, a full service public relations and promotional marketing firm located in Lincolnwood, Illinois. She can be reached at [contact@falkpr.com](mailto:contact@falkpr.com).*

