More than half (56%) of Americans say that legislators should prioritize protecting the environment and addressing climate change, according to data from the Pew Research Center. That’s an increase from a decade ago, when only 41% of Americans viewed climate change as a top issue. With a growing number of Americans worried about the effects of climate change, some psychologists are doing more than helping their patients cope with the anticipated changes: They are creating eco-friendly, or “green,” practices.

“For a practice to be green, it’s not about deprivation. It’s about living well as a positive contributor to the systems on which all life depends,” says conservation psychologist John Fraser, PhD, president and chief executive officer of Knology, a nonprofit transdisciplinary social science think tank. Fraser is also the past president of APA Div. 34 (Society for Environmental, Population and Conservation Psychology). “As psychologists, we are the best-equipped people to be self-aware. We can understand how and why we do something and how our actions influence others.”

Want to build your own cleaner and greener practice? Follow these six tips:

1. DETERMINE WHY YOU WANT A GREEN PRACTICE
Before changing out all the light bulbs in your office to their energy-efficient counterparts, Thomas Doherty, PsyD, recommends identifying your environmental values and why it’s important to run a green practice. “People tend to rush to actions, but
“There’s a preconversation to have,” says Doherty, a licensed psychologist who runs Sustainable Self, a practice in Portland, Oregon. “Your actions will change as you get more experience, and as technology changes and as the needs of the environment change. But your values will remain fairly stable through your life. Celebrate these and let them be your guide.”

Doherty says these three sets of values tend to influence people’s approach to protecting the environment:

- **Egocentric**: actions that benefit the individual, their family or inner circle;
- **Altruistic**: actions that benefit the health and well-being of people in the community;
- **Biocentric**: actions that improve nature and the global landscape.

### 2. CONDUCT A “GREEN AUDIT”

To help decide what you can change, Nancy Piotrowski, PhD, a San Francisco–based clinical and consultant psychologist, urges practitioners to consider the impact their practices have on the planet: What is your carbon footprint—the amount of carbon dioxide each person produces resulting from fossil fuel use in their daily life?

How do you get to work? Is your practice paperless? Are you recycling and can you do more? Is your office located in a building that uses green technologies and energies? Are you using energy efficient lighting?

### 3. USE ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

Electronic health records (EHRs) can dramatically reduce a practice’s paper trail—and some clients prefer it, Piotrowski says. With EHRs, you can keep all your patients’ clinical details in one place, track outcomes and share information with other providers. Many EHRs also help with practice management tasks, like billing and scheduling, without the added paperwork.

### 4. MOVE YOUR OFFICE TO A GREEN BUILDING

Use your rent and utilities payments to support green building programs. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), for example, is one of a number of internationally recognized rating systems that examine the green components of buildings. LEED buildings are rated for their performance in conserving...
resources and using energy efficiently. APA’s headquarters in Washington, D.C., received LEED certification in 2013.


Fraser says you can also select wind or solar suppliers for your energy utility.

5. LESSEN YOUR CARBON FOOTPRINT

Due to the nature of their work, most practicing psychologists probably have a low carbon footprint. Still, Doherty says, psychologists can be mindful of their travel. Doherty lives close to his office and limits his plane travel, for example.

Piotrowski encourages teleconferencing with colleagues instead of physical meetings.

“I know a lot of us are hooked on physical meetings. That has value, but I find that we spend a lot of money traveling, and there’s a higher carbon footprint with air travel. So, if I can do something with webinars and conference calls and electronic communications, I try to do that.”

She also provides psychological services via telephone or videoconferencing. “That’s another green savings because I’m not commuting, and I have a lot more control over my environment.”

6. SHOW AFFECTED COMMUNITIES HOW YOU CAN HELP

Psychology practitioners can also become more green by increasing their outreach to communities that may need help managing the trauma and anxiety related to environmental change, says Piotrowski, who lives near Napa Valley, where wildfires raged for weeks in 2017 and destroyed nearly 9,000 buildings.

“Psychologists don’t have to become an expert on every natural catastrophe, but you can learn about the potential impact on your clients,” says Piotrowski, who talks with people in her community about air quality monitoring, making good health decisions and managing anxiety when the air-quality is poor.

“People don’t know that they can talk to a psychologist about these issues,” she adds. “Psychologists can be green just by putting themselves in the right place and working with their community.”

Electronic communications like webinars, videoconferences and conference calls are more environmentally friendly than traveling for in-person meetings.