

PLANET FRIENDLY



# pens



Don't stop with recycled paper and notepads, **Suzannah Wright** guides you through the options for making your writing tools as green as possible.

**y**ou're buying recycled paper, diligently using any scraps to make notes and recycling as much paper waste as you can. But have you given any thought to the things you're writing with?

There are no official figures on the amount of pens we discard each year, but environmental charity Wastewatch says that in the US they throw out over 4,000,000,000 pens daily. That's an average of about 13 pens per person per day, which would equate to around 800,000,000 pens if UK citizens were getting through them at the same rate.

The good news is, pen makers are lining up to help you make your stationary cupboard as green as possible, offering pens with recycled content or eco-designs to reduce waste. Advances in technology, combined with environmental commitments from major brands to keep costs down on green products, mean that an eco-pen needn't be a compromise. But with so many brands pushing their green messages, it can be hard to work out which is the greenest choice for your office.

To guide your decisions, it's worth going back to that old environmental mantra: reduce, reuse, recycle. Reduce is normally at the top of the green tree, but since recycling is the hot topic in pens at the moment, that's where we'll start.

You can't easily recycle pens, since they contain several different materials and are not usually made of readily recyclable plastics, but you can support the recycling industry by choosing pens which are made from recycled material. Encouraging the use of recycled content in as many products as possible helps to create a market for all those plastic bottles you are carefully separating out at home, so you can feel part of a green-loop of virtue when you choose a pen with recycled plastic.

Almost all pen makers now offer at least one or two products with recycled content, and many are offering whole ranges. At first sight you might think the greenest choice is the pens with the most recycled content, but you should consider issues of refillability and suitability for the job as well.

It's vital that any green pens you choose offer the same quality and performance as the standard choice – it's no good buying green if they end up in the bin because they don't do their job. But pen manufacturers have worked hard to ensure that their recycled ranges offer the same choice and quality as other ranges, so you should be able to find what you need, be it a highlighter, correction pen or classic ball point pen.

Several makers are also offering refillable ball-point pens made from recycled materials.



This is an environmental double whammy, as long as you do refill the pens as much as possible to extend their life span. Any refillable or reusable product tends to have used more material and energy in its manufacture and transportation, so if you don't make the most of it then you're just increasing waste.

If you don't think your office will commit to using refills, look for pens which use as little material as possible. Some brands offer green pens which have fewer components, making them less wasteful both in terms of the energy used to make them, and the amount of landfill they produce. Also try to find out about the packaging the pens will come in – look for ranges which have minimal packaging and use recycled, and if possible recyclable, materials. Buying your pens in bulk also reduces the packaging needed to get them to you, as well as offering cost benefits.

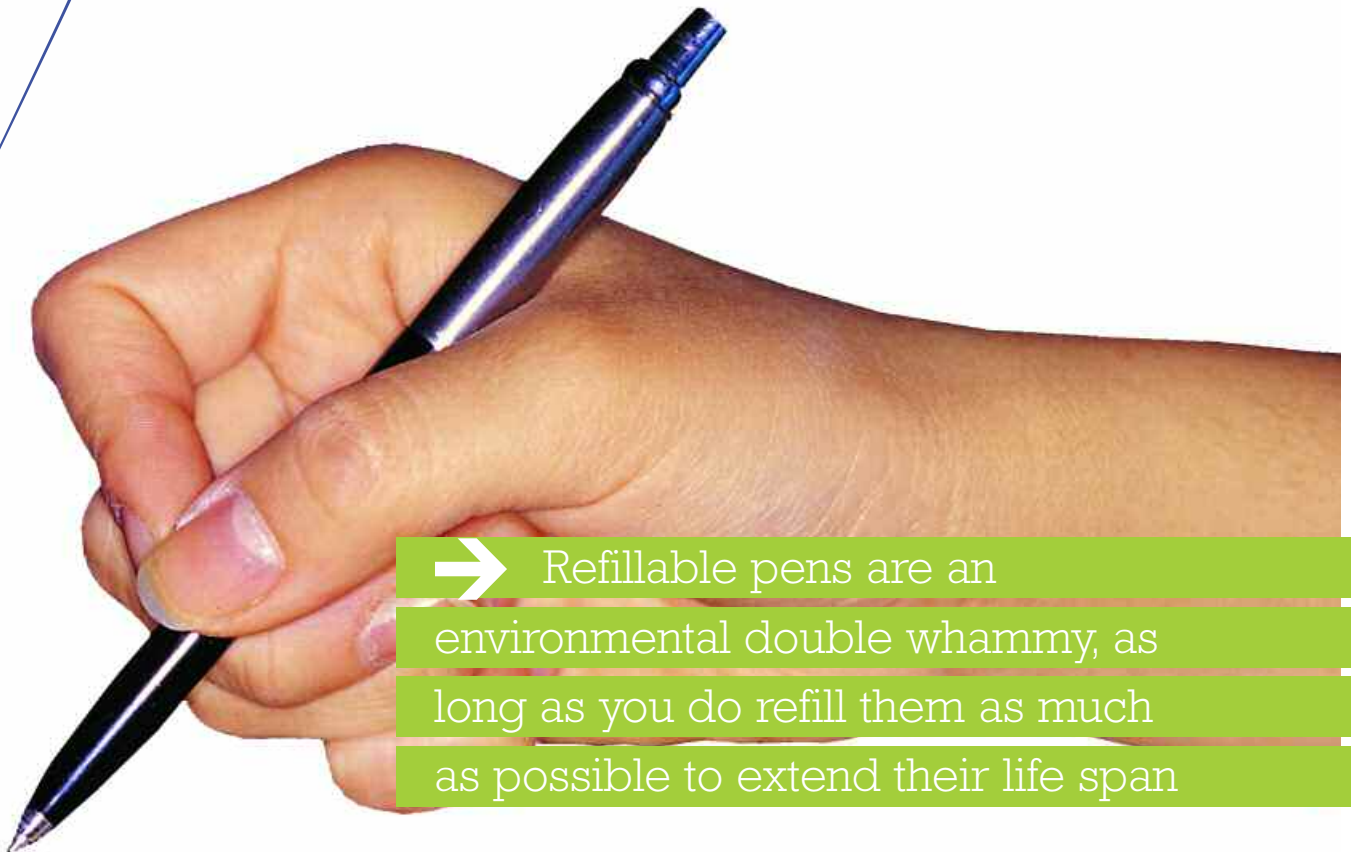
You can reduce waste by extending the life of the pens you choose, for example by replacing lids on highlighters and marker pens. If you don't want to end up sounding like a school teacher, there are pens available with

extra strong lids which can prevent nibs drying up. And you should think about reducing the amount of damaging substances in your pens. Look for inks with no toxic heavy metals or lead-based colouring agents, and inks free from the solvents xylene and toluene.

If you're really committed to supporting the green choice in your purchasing, it's worth asking your dealer about the environmental commitments of the manufacturers. Have they signed up to the green manufacturing standard ISO 14001, which means they must be trying to reduce waste and energy usage in their manufacturing and design processes, for example? Or are they planning to reduce or offset their carbon emissions?

With such a large choice of eco-pens on the market, and costs and performance essentially the same as other pens, choosing a green pen is really a no-brainer. No-one is suggesting you can save the world with one pen, but every small choice adds up and the more green products you provide for your colleagues, the more your office will be aware of and ready to address environmental issues. ●

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