

Environmental Learning Center's

Sustainability Policy

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www.DiscoverELC.org

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Purpose

As our area's premiere environmental education provider, the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) should be leading the way toward a more sustainable future. We strive to influence students, program participants, campus visitors, and the community at large whose behaviors and decisions can be shaped by what they learn from their ELC experiences. We have an opportunity and a responsibility to consider the examples we set in our programs, in our offices and on our campus. We practice and encourage environmental stewardship.

The purpose of this document is to incorporate environmental considerations as the first priority in all decision making. It is intended to guide ELC's practices toward environmental sustainability and stewardship.

The ELC will conserve natural resources by:

- reducing waste through the 5 R Philosophy (refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, recycle)
- reducing water and energy consumption
- maximizing our use of solar power
- reducing and then offsetting CO2 emissions

Moreover, the ELC will minimize negative impacts on the environment by:

- using environmentally certified products and paper goods
- using items made from recycled materials
- providing "environmentally friendly" products in our gift shop
- following the LEED Green Building Council standards

This guiding document is a living document that adapts to new information and technologies as they become available. Our conservation and sustainability policies will grow and change as our organization develops over time.

Live Animals and Wildlife Specimen

We understand the delicate balance between education and entertainment. The ELC will provide display of and proper care for live specimens by following set regulations in order to offer educational opportunities with live animals.

1. Provide education. All displays involving live animals and wildlife products, will serve an educational purpose beyond that of simply showing the animal itself.
2. Do not accept specimen donations from private citizens (unless education staff has made special considerations and deem that the donation in question will serve an educational purpose).
3. Update regularly and follow all state and federal permit regulations. All original permits kept on file with Executive Director; copies on file with the Education Coordinator.
4. Provide proper care and nutrition, observing common standards for maintaining live specimens. Education staff will consult experts as necessary.
5. Ensure and regulate proper tank conditions. If necessary, ELC will hire an aquarium service.
6. Use only native, hardy animals in displays on campus and special events unless illustrating a particular educational point, such as invasive exotics.
7. Consult and follow Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the American Humane Society's Humane Conservation standards when possible.

Land Management and Landscaping

The ELC campus will be vegetated with native plants. Most of the campus will be left "natural." In designated areas, and for educational purposes only, some plants will be maintained in a fashion to demonstrate potential manicured landscaping with natives. Landscaping will be rigorously maintained, removing all non-native species.

1. Use and promote a water-efficient, low maintenance landscape using drought resistant native plants and ground cover. Plants that occur naturally in an ecosystem are adapted to the local temperature and rainfall patterns, so they generally require less maintenance, have fewer pests, and require less watering.
2. Remove all invasive and exotic plants. Herbicides will be used only when hand removal is too difficult or not cost effective. When herbicides are used, use per label instructions.
3. Compost organic wastes and use as fertilizer. When fertilizers are used, use per label instructions. Every year, the average American throws out about 1,200 pounds of organic garbage that can be composted. Using compost improves soil structure, texture, and aeration and increases the soil's water-holding capacity. Adding compost improves soil fertility and stimulates healthy root development in plants.
4. Use mulch to retain moisture in the soil around plants and on trails to prevent volunteer plants. All attempts should be made to buy locally produced mulch. Do not use cypress mulch; its harvest depletes cypress wetlands.

5. Raise the lawn mower blade to 3" to encourage grass roots to grow deeper and hold soil moisture. Leave grass clippings on the ground, which adds nitrogen to the soil. Grass clippings do not cause thatch, this is caused by the accumulation of dead roots and stems.
6. Use a low-flow drip system when irrigation is used (for example in center field after large ELC events). Grey water reuse system is recommended.
7. Prune trees only when required by insurance or when plants obstruct a walkway, rub against a window, or pose a threat to ELC property and visitors. Remove natural plant debris to reduce fire hazards.
8. Keep pond free of excessive cattail growth and nuisance vegetation; this will allow best water circulation. Hand removal is preferred; herbicides may be used only when necessary. Algae blooms may occur and should be left alone unless prolific.
9. Conduct routine sediment removal from retention pond.
10. Transplant volunteer seedlings whenever possible.

Retail Purchasing

Our retail merchandise speaks volumes about our mission at the ELC. Sustainability education takes place when consumers purchase environmentally friendly products accompanied by educational signage. Manufacturing, packaging, shipping and displaying are all aspects that carry conservation education opportunities.

1. Offer environmentally friendly and local products. Sell items that encourage environmentally friendly behaviors – such as canvas shopping bags, clothes pins, re-usable water bottles, solar powered items, reusable lunchboxes, etc.
2. Sell items with minimal packaging. Inquire about packaging when purchasing; let suppliers know that the ELC is more likely to purchase from companies making efforts to minimize packaging.
3. Reuse packaging; when not possible, take packing to mailing centers such as Pak Mail. Keep Indian River Beautiful's Upcycle It program accepts various items; see KIRB Upcycle It document for a comprehensive list of items accepted..
4. Make an effort to purchase and sell items made from reused and recycled materials. For recycling to be effective and economically viable, the materials must re-enter the market and be used again. Buying recycled-content products helps "close the loop."
5. Do not sell single-use plastic items. Merchandise made from recycled plastic is encouraged.
6. Do not buy or sell or any products made from endangered or threatened species such as real ivory, furs, reptile items (such as lizard or alligator skin items), shells, or corals.
7. Promote toys that have an environmental and/or conservation educational message.
8. Always ask customers if they can do without a bag; encourage them not to take one for small purchases. Recycled paper bags are ideal and plastic bags should never be used.
9. Showcase local artists and craftsmen who produce items that are aesthetically pleasing, have educational value, and are fun, useful and environmentally friendly.

10. Add educational tags/signage to merchandise to explain what material the product is made from and how it can impact the environment.
11. When needed, purchase used fixtures such as shelving units instead of buying new, and avoid plastics.
12. Email receipts rather than printing. Only provide paper receipts for customers requesting them.
13. For food items, seek sustainable packaging. For example offer aluminum canned drinks instead of plastic bottles, and paper or biodegradable packaging material instead of single-use plastic wrappers.

Cleaning Products

Cleaning products have a direct impact on our environment. The final destination of these products is usually the water or air. Many also contribute to indoor air pollution, are poisonous if ingested, and can be harmful if inhaled or touched. The ELC strives to use alternative cleaning products that are less harmful to the environment and can be economical as well.

1. The best way to ensure the safety of all-purpose cleaners is to make them at home. A few safe, simple ingredients like baking soda, vinegar, lemon juice, Castile oil-based soap, hydrogen peroxide and borax, aided by a little elbow grease and a coarse sponge for scrubbing, can take care of most household and business cleaning needs. Many recipes can be found on line.
2. Use cleaning products with A or B ratings from third party organizations like The Environmental Working Group*. Check the Green Seal website before switching to another product.
3. Use only all-natural, bio-based cleaners. Use non-aerosol general surface cleaners, free of fragrances and dyes, petrochemicals.
4. Disinfectants and sanitizers should not be used for general cleaning and should not be used when children are present. They should be used sparingly, for bodily fluid spills and other public health concerns or when required by the Department of Health.

*<https://www.ewg.org/guides/cleaners>

Office Supplies

Many office supplies made from recycled products are available. When possible, ELC will use items made from recycled materials. Recycling and using recycled items helps to preserve natural resources, increase the market and bring down the cost.

1. Make double-sided copies.
2. Use paper made from sugarcane waste fiber* versus products from trees.
3. Put paper printed on one side near the copier to be available for drafts (post a diagram for all copy machine users).
4. Re-use leftover paper for scratch pads, message pads.
5. Recycle office paper and shred confidential papers only. Use shredded paper for composting and donate to local animal shelters.
6. Use only paper and print products (invitations, announcements, save-the-date, etc.) certified by the Forest Stewardship Council*.

7. Printer ink: recycle ink cartridges, refill or use recycled ink cartridges, only print when necessary and save ink and paper by using draft mode (unless printing important documents).
8. Re-label and reuse file folders, hanging folders and plastic tabs, instead of buying new ones.
9. Keep paper correspondences to a minimum.
10. Remove duplicate names from catalogues, mailings, etc. (both outgoing and incoming mail).
11. Use lap top and projector when working on large draft documents in group settings, instead of making multiple copies for participants.
12. Only purchase Rainforest Alliance Certified coffee (because it is shade grown, organic, fair trade coffee) and use only non-bleached coffee filters. Avoid Keurig machines that require single-use plastics.
13. Use vegetable-based ink. Ink manufacturing plants contribute to Total Volatile Organic Compounds Emissions. 15% of Total VOC emissions are attributed to the use of these paints and inks.
14. Use DonorShops, Survey Monkey, and/or other online registration and survey form options in place of printed forms.

*Paper made from sugarcane waste fiber: <http://treezero.com/>

For more info please see: <https://us.fsc.org/en-us/market/paper-printing>

Pest Control

Pest control at the ELC should be undertaken through an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program where a variety of techniques are used to try and control the target pest and reduce the risk of using pesticides. The easiest natural remedy for infestations is prevention.

1. Survey for pests prior to a pesticide application. All pesticide applications should be made based on need, not on a routine schedule.
2. Use only insecticides and repellents which are labeled for the target pest and use the chemical as per label specifications.
3. To avoid wood being impacted by wood boring beetles and termites, prevention is the best method. Avoid the timber contact with soil and keep the wood dry. Subterranean termite infestations can be minimized by elevating the structure on steel supports and using foundation shields and grooves. Always make regular inspections for the presence of termites.
4. Control fire ants with an insect growth regulating insecticide (or some similar labeled material). Paths that are traveled frequently should have treatment priority.
5. To prevent roaches, don't provide them with opportunities for obtaining waste food items or water. Eliminate gaps around water pipes, doors and windows using caulking or weather-stripping. Cover all food.
6. Remove all open containers to avoid producing mosquitoes. Keep campus free of non- natural sources of standing water.

EPA's Integrated Pest Management Principles: <https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/integrated-pest-management-ipm-principles>

The 5 R Philosophy

Through school programs, education efforts and staff practices, the ELC promotes the Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle approach. Our waste reduction and recycling activities can make a difference.

1. **Refuse** unnecessary products when possible; plastic straws, bottled water, and grocery bags are some of the easiest items to eliminate from daily use.
2. **Reduce** usage of single use items whenever possible; for example, use reusable coffee mugs and glasses during in house meetings.
3. **Reuse** products to extend the life of something that might typically be thrown away.
4. **Repurpose** items that would normally be thrown out. Many craft projects can include the use of repurposed items like empty egg cartons, plastic bottles and caps, and toilet paper tubes. Be mindful of the usefulness of the product and the whole life of the item; once it is made into a craft, can it still be recycled?
5. **Recycle** whenever possible, and be conscious of recycling contamination; one incorrect item in the recycling can cause the entirety of the bin to be sent to the landfill. In the office as well as during all events (held both on and off campus). Ensure that all occupants, vendors, caterers, and subcontractors are aware of our 5 R Philosophy. Keep up to date on recycling information and opportunities.
6. The ELC is a Styrofoam-free campus. Approved paper products and biodegradable containers will be made available for purchase by outside groups.
7. Make it easy for occupants, vendors, caterers, and subcontractors to recycle. Make provisions for storage of recyclables: recycling bins near kitchen, bathrooms, Entry Pavilion, public meeting spaces and event sites.
8. Donate unused and reusable materials to Keep Indian River Beautiful Upcycle It! program; see KIRB Upcycle It! document for a comprehensive list of items accepted, or e-mail Daisy@KeepIndianRiverBeautiful.org with questions
9. Compost kitchen and school lunch fruit and vegetable matter.

What can you RECYCLE??

As of 12/23/2019 the Solid Waste Disposal District of Indian River County accepts*:

- **PLASTICS:** All plastic containers except for plastic bags or plastic film. Please empty, lightly rinse, and discard loose caps, otherwise all caps should be securely fastened to the plastic bottles
- **PAPER:** All paper not contaminated by food, including newspaper, magazines, catalogs, telephone books, junk mail, office paper, cardboard, paper bags, paperboard food boxes (but *not* pizza boxes), chipboard paper, file folders, envelopes with and without windows, paperback books, mixed paper, paper towel and toilet tissue rolls etc.
- **CLEAN FOOD AND BEVERAGE CARTONS:** All juice boxes, milk and juice containers, and soup and broth containers. Please no juice pouches or straws. Please empty, lightly rinse, and discard loose caps, otherwise all caps should be securely fastened to the plastic bottles.

- **FOOD AND BEVERAGE CONTAINERS:** All aluminum and steel cans, empty aerosol cans, aluminum pie plates and trays. Please empty and lightly rinse. Aluminum tabs and steel caps are acceptable.
- **GLASS:** All glass bottles and jars. Please empty, lightly rinse and include metal caps separately in the cart.
- **The ELC is a Rack'n Pak collection facility.** Soft plastic items may be recycled in these specialty bins including: plastic films, bags, wrapping, Ziploc baggies, bubble wrap, newspaper sleeves, air pillows, case wrap, produce bags, saran wrap, etc.
- The following items cannot be recycled through Indian River County, and must be either dropped off at special facilities that specialize in recycling these items, donated to thrift stores, or thrown away in the trash: Electronics, Hoses, Pyrex Cookware, Styrofoam, Six Pack Rings, Plastic Bags, Clothing, Rubber Items, Ceramics, Shrink Wrap, Loose Plastic Bottle Caps, Candles with Wax, Window Glass, Frozen Food Bags, Dog Food Bags, and anything that is dirty or wet.

* For more information on the Indian River County recycling program, visit:

http://www.ircrecycles.com/Residential_Recycling.htm

Energy Conservation

The ELC will make a conscience effort to reduce our energy consumption. By doing so we save money, preserve our natural resources, and reduce our dependency on foreign sources.

1. During summer and warmer months, turn all thermostats to 80 degrees Fahrenheit at night and on weekends when buildings are not in use. When rooms are in use, set the thermostat at 76 degrees or higher. During winter, set thermostats at 69 and 72 in Discovery Station (for animal wellbeing) or lower only when necessary.
2. Install programmable thermostats in offices, Entry Pavilion and Nature Nook. Turn air conditioning off at night and set to come on half an hour before staff and volunteers come in.
3. Ask energy provider to conduct an energy inspection and an energy audit. Incorporate feasible recommendations.
4. Install and maintain occupancy sensors in buildings that aren't continually occupied.
5. Turn off lights when not in use, and on sunny days when natural daylight is plentiful, consider keeping lights off.
6. Turn off computer monitor and printer when away from computer more than 1 hour.
7. Be conscious of vampire energy usage; unplug items that are not being used continually (such as coffee pots)
8. Insulate the attic to an R-value of 30. If a radiant barrier is in place, R-19 will offer maximum saving on the heating and cooling costs of the building.
9. Replace or clean the air conditioning filters every month to increase air-conditioning efficiency, extend its life, and benefit from cleaner indoor air.
10. Shade south and west windows on the outside with vines, solar screens, shades, awning or other window treatment to control heat gain.
11. Increase use of solar power. Convert and use exhibit space as a "solar power showcase."

12. All lighting left on over night should be solar powered.
13. As older fans are replaced, install Energy Star ceiling fans rated here:
<https://www.energystar.gov/most-efficient/me-certified-ceiling-fans>.
14. Install solar water heaters. Set water heater thermostats no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.
15. Look for the Energy Star label on new appliances to choose the most efficient models. Continually review energy efficient technology changes.
16. Inspect insulation of duct work annually.

Water Conservation

Due to increased populations, increased demands from agriculture and industry and subsequent increases in waste and pollution, a severe water shortage along with the inability of sewage treatment centers to keep up are some of the most serious long range environmental problems facing Florida and the world. The ELC strives to conserve its water use.

1. Install water-efficient equipment. Water conserving toilets, showerheads, and faucet aerators not only reduce water use, they also reduce demand on septic systems or sewage treatment plants.
2. Check for water leaks on regular basis. Ask people who clean bathrooms to alert staff of maintenance needs.
3. Install automatic turnoff on faucets in bathrooms.
4. Landscape watering should only be done with collected rainwater.
5. Water in compliance with local water management district requirements. Regular maintenance needs to be undertaken to make certain the system is working properly (e.g., water not hitting the road unnecessarily, etc.). Local information found here: <https://www.sjrwmd.com/>
6. Use a spigot timer for hours when no one is on campus.
7. Inspect septic system annually. Hook up to county sewer as soon as possible. Improperly maintained and older septic systems can contaminate ground water and surface water with nutrients and pathogens. If possible, ELC should hook up to county sewer. An estimated 2.7 million households or businesses use individual septic systems in Florida. This generates significant amounts of wastewater and associated pollutants, including algae blooms and seagrass and fish kills
8. Septic systems are for sewage waste only. Only things that have been eaten and digested should be put down the drains; household products or medicines, grease, baby wipes, feminine products, bleach, and anything other than toilet paper should never be put down drains and toilets.

Carbon Footprint

Climate change is the most pressing environmental issue facing humanity. The ELC will work to lower CO² emissions and then “zero out” its carbon emissions by measuring and then offsetting the total emissions.

1. Calculate total CO₂ emissions staff and volunteers create driving to and from the ELC and work to offset those emissions by planting required number of trees. There are many Carbon Footprint Calculators available for free on the internet.

2. Develop a comprehensive zero out program, including “Zero Out Sponsors” for all events, tree planting days for volunteers, etc.
3. Drive less. Encourage walking, biking, carpooling and combine errands.
4. Encourage use of hybrid and EV vehicles through installation of charging stations in long term planning. Provide access to outlet as a temporary solution.
5. Encourage visitors to bike to the ELC by installing bike racks.
6. Prohibit school busses from idling while dropping off and picking up students.
7. For events and meetings requiring the purchase of food, when possible, purchase from local sources and reduce meat and dairy. Purchase foodstuffs in bulk.
8. Encourage vegetarian meals at events and employee gatherings.

Construction Practices

The ELC will adopt sustainable strategies during design and construction projects by following the Green Building Council LEED rating system standards. *For more information, please see

<https://new.usgbc.org/leed>

1. Optimize use of interior space through careful design so that the overall building size, and resource use, is kept to a minimum.
2. Use high levels of insulation, high-performance windows, and tight construction.
3. Use materials that emit pollutants sparingly and only when necessary to ensure durability and longevity of the structure. Solvent-based finishes, paints, adhesives, carpeting, particleboard, and many other building products release formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air. These chemicals can affect workers’ and occupants’ health as well as contribute to smog and ground-level ozone pollution outside.
4. Seek responsible wood supplies. Use Forest Stewardship Council* certified lumber.
5. Design buildings to use renewable energy. Passive solar heating, daylighting, and natural cooling can be incorporated cost effectively into most buildings. Consider solar water heating and photovoltaics – or design buildings for future solar installations.
6. Use recycled plastic lumber for boardwalks, picnic tables, and other outdoor structures instead of pressure treated wood. As sections of boardwalk are replaced, use recycled plastic lumber.
7. Design for future reuse and adaptability: Make the structure adaptable to other uses, and choose materials and components that can be reused or recycled.
8. Install high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment: Well-designed high-efficiency furnaces, boilers, and air conditioners (and distribution systems) save the building occupants money and produce less pollution during operation.
9. Install high-efficiency lights and appliances. High-efficiency appliances offer both economic and environmental advantages over their conventional counterparts.

*For more info please see: <https://us.fsc.org/en-us>

Outside User Groups

The ELC encourages everyone to adopt more sustainable lifestyles and business actions. In particular, the ELC requires that all groups using any part of our facilities adhere to minimum standards set forth by these policies.

1. Use double sided handouts. When possible, fit more than one flyer per sheet of paper and do not print too many copies
2. Reuse or recycle all left over materials.
3. Compost when possible. If appropriate, consider donating left over food and supplies to local charities.
4. If using the A/C, ensure that doors and windows remained closed.
5. When finished using space, turn the thermometer to 80 in the summer, or turn off in the winter. Specifics are posted above each thermostat in each room.
6. When finished using spaces, turn off all lights, ceiling fans and appliances.
7. No Styrofoam (polystyrene) and single-use plastics. When using catering and/or take-out services, make arrangements for a Styrofoam free service. In general, we suggest minimizing packaging, and using paper products in lieu of plastics. We prohibit the use of Styrofoam (polystyrene) because it does not biodegrade, it persists in the environment and poses a threat to wildlife.
8. No balloons. Because most spaces at the ELC are out-of-doors (or, one must go outside to get from place to place), we prohibit the use of balloons which do not easily biodegrade, persist in the environment and pose a threat to wildlife.
9. No glitter or products containing micro-plastics.
10. For outside food vendors: no single-use plastic straws, cups, or cutlery. Biodegradable, reusable, and/or paper products are preferred.
11. Require outside groups to complete an application or registration form that includes agreeing to abide by the aforementioned conservation practices.