



Almost New Again

Military installations can reduce their carbon footprint and save money by refurbishing older furniture. **By Mario Insenga**

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The call for organizations to go green is reaching fever pitch. Establishing eco-friendly practices and reducing our carbon footprint can sometimes appear to be a daunting task, but it needn't be difficult or expensive.

One way to reduce the environmental impact of a military facility lies in intelligent and efficient management of furniture assets.

The impact of new

Eventually furniture begins to look old. Many people immediately think of replacing it, but that can have a massive impact on the environment. Consider what's involved. First, trees are cut down, sent to the factory, dried, and cut to size. Next, the furniture has to be constructed, releasing harmful chemicals into the air, and then transported a distant destination, which can significantly add to the carbon footprint. After that, the old furniture has to be disposed of. Some may be recycled, but there's a good probability that it will end up in a landfill.

Refurbishing furniture is considerably more environmentally friendly. A refinishing company can repair, rework, and reupholster existing furniture, which is often of superior quality than new purchases.

The federal government understands the issue. A number of laws attempt to limit government agencies' impact on the environment, such as USC Title 40, The Pollution Prevention Act of 1990, President George W. Bush's Executive Order 13243, the Clean Air Act of 1970, and the 2000 International Fire Code.

A part of USC Title 40 was passed in an effort to ensure that government procurement procedures follow envi-



Refurbished furniture, as shown here, can be an eco-friendly option for military installations looking to upgrade older or worn-out pieces of furniture.



ronmentally friendly best practices. The statute refers specifically to furniture: "A department or agency of the federal government may not use amounts provided by law to purchase furniture if the Administrator of General Services determines that requirements can reasonably be met by transferring excess furniture, including rehabilitated furniture, from other departments or agencies pursuant to this subtitle."

Refinishing processes are not risky, and there's no shortage of proof to back that up—hotels and universities have been refinishing existing furniture for more than 30 years. Until recently, furniture refurbishment has been almost exclusively the preserve of the private sector. This is changing, however, with more and more military bases starting to comply with USC Title 40 by renovating and reupholstering the furniture in their facilities.

Case in point

In 2001, the NCO Academy at Fort Benning, Georgia, needed repairs on solid oak furniture. The installation simply could not afford to spend the \$275,000 it would take to replace the furniture. Instead, staff members decided to refinish the furniture. Refinishing contractors started on-site repairs and reconstructions, and within one week, the Academy's entire inventory was renovated at a cost of just under \$60,000. Renovating furniture instead of replac-

ing it reduced expenditures by 78 percent.

The benefits of refurbishing furniture are clear, so why don't more people do it? To start, there are a few myths surrounding the practice. Many agencies and departments believe furniture must be sent away for

refinishing, but, this is no longer true. Modern refinishing techniques don't use any harmful or dangerous chemicals, and furniture refinishing is performed on site, with minimal disruption. The process is quick and easy. For example, a refinishing contractor can take up to 15 rooms for renovation in the morning

and return them fully renovated by the end of the same business day.

Another concern is that the quality of the refinished furniture is inferior to new purchases. As long as a reputable contractor is hired, this is not the case. Furniture can be restored to be as good as new—often better than new furniture purchased on a limited budget.

By using existing furniture assets and the newest technologies, the military services can reduce their carbon footprint while also cutting costs. Refinishing presents an excellent opportunity for thoughtful managers to make a positive impact on quality of life, budget management, and environmental sustainability.

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