

Environmental Policies - How They Can Help Your Business and How to Write One

What is an environmental policy?

'The environmental policy is a short public declaration that states the organisation's intentions and commitment to improving their environmental performance. It also provides the focus for the development and operation of the environmental management system, and is a requirement of both BS EN ISO 14001 and EMAS.' (BS 8555).

What this means

- Broad statement by your company, fully endorsed by top management.
- Makes commitments to sound environmental management and continual improvement.
- Like your health and safety or quality policy.

Why should you have one?

- Your customers and clients may be asking for one. Environment is becoming more important for organisations, especially public sector and corporates. Now that many of them have started to get their own house in order, they are looking at their supply chain.
- Environmental management and resource efficiency can save you money.
- It demonstrates you are a responsible company, reducing your customer and clients' risks.
- You can use your policy as a great marketing tool, giving 'an edge' in a competitive market.
- Your policy provides a focus for your environmental management – it 'provides a framework for action and for the setting of environmental objectives and environmental targets' (ISO 14001).
- Is a requirement of the environmental management standards ISO 14001 and BS 8555.

Things your environmental policy must do

'4.2 Environmental Policy - top management shall define the organisation's environmental policy and ensure that, within the defined scope of its environmental management system, it

- Is appropriate to the nature, scale and environmental impacts of its activities, products and services, (waste, energy, water, transport, resource use, procurement, air and land emissions, ecology).
 - Includes a commitment to continual improvement and prevention of pollution.
 - Includes a commitment to comply with applicable legal requirements and with other requirement to which the organisation subscribes.
 - Provides the framework for setting and reviewing environmental objectives and targets.
 - Is documented, implemented and maintained.
 - Is communicated to all persons working on behalf of the organisation.
 - Is available to the public.'
- ISO 14001 (BS8555 is very similar).

A good policy will also

- Be clear and easy to read.
- Probably be about one side of A4.
- Balance general statements with some detail.
- Not commit to things you can't achieve.
- Be easy to get hold of.
- Be dated and signed by top management.

Other tips

- Don't include sweeping statements.
- Don't include jargon.

- Don't make things so specific you have to update it frequently – this makes more work for you.
- Don't copy and paste someone else's – it's meant to be yours.
- You may want to look at other policies you have such as quality or health and safety to portray a corporate image.

Think about your environmental impacts

It's not enough just to say, 'we're environmentally friendly'. You may switch off lights and taps and recycle paper, but there is always more you can do. Think about where your biggest environmental impacts are (hint – these are often associated with costs, such as paying for skip/bin hire, buying fuel, procuring materials etc). The points below may help.

- Waste management – specific wastes such as plasterboard, timber, paint and adhesive cans, metals, rubble.
- Transport – specifically petrol and diesel.
- Utilities – energy and water use.
- Resources/materials – linking in with issues such as reusing and recycling (or reclaiming) materials and making careful purchasing decisions such as not over-ordering, and buying materials with a lower environmental impact such as FSC timber, low or non VOC paints and glues, or 'green-themed' interior features eg recycled glass bricks.

You may also be able to influence clients to install energy and water saving technologies, recycle more, reuse materials or procure 'green' materials.

How to write an environmental policy

- Look at other company environmental policies, especially those of your competitors, customers and clients. Also look at your own policies such as H&S or quality.
- What works well? What do you like?
- Begin to draft your own policy:

- A couple of sentences outlining your company.
- A couple of sentences outlining your commitment to environment.
- Talk about your significant environmental impacts? Eg waste, energy, water, transport, resource use, procurement, emissions...
- Set a framework for setting and reviewing objectives and targets.

- Once you are happy with your policy, pass it to a couple of other staff to have a look at. It may be useful to get feedback from operations managers, office managers, a 'green champion', managing directors or other top management. Don't forget that you may need to explain to them what it's for and the sort of format it's in.
- When it's finalised, get the Director to sign and date it.
- Now you have your policy – use it! Put it on your website and include it in tenders and proposals. You could email copies to your customers and clients to demonstrate your interest in environment.

Further information

If you need assistance preparing your environmental policy, or would like to learn more about our environmental policy workshops, please contact Susan Steensma at Business Eco - tel: 020 8915 0097, email: ss@eco.uk.com

Acknowledgement: This Factfile Information Sheet has been prepared by Business Eco, tel: 020 8915 0097, website www.eco.uk.com. If you require up-to-date information on environmental legislation and regulations, including monthly amendments that may affect your business, a legal e-zine written for small businesses is available for free from Business Eco.

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