

Drafting environmental policy

This reference note can be used to help to write a clear and concise environmental policy.

1. Introduction

Environmental policy is a written statement outlining an organisation's mission in relation to managing the environmental effects and aspects of its various operations.

To obtain certification to a formal standard the environmental policy will be the cornerstone of an environmental management system's development and implementation.

2. Information

The environmental policy will clearly state the aims and principles of the organisation with respect to impact on the environment. The policy will allow management to communicate aims and objectives to employees and other interested parties, including stakeholders, customers and suppliers.

3. The benefits of writing an environmental policy

- Assuring customers of commitment to demonstrable environmental management
- Maintaining good public/community relations
- Enhancing image, reputation and market share
- Improving cost control, saving money
- Reducing incidents that result in liability
- Conserving raw materials and energy
- Sharing environmental solutions
- Improving industry/government relations.

4. The format and style of the policy

The style will reflect company culture. The following basic rules will ensure the policy is clearly written and concise. The statement should be:

- Short - longer than a sheet of A4 would be too long
- Easy to read - it's meant for everyone to understand
- Realistic, achievable and relevant to activities and practices of the organisation

The statement must demonstrate a commitment to making the policy work and should be signed, dated and endorsed by the Chief Executive.

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5. Statements contained in the policy

- A commitment to continuous improvement
- Recognition of compliance with relevant environmental legislation as a minimum level of performance
- The education and training of employees in environmental issues and the environmental effects of their activities
- Regular monitoring of progress and annual review of environmental performance

6. Additional issues to be addressed in environmental policy, include:

- Minimising transport (saving costs)
- Recycling of packaging materials
- Minimising waste – reduce disposal charges
- Efficient use of water/energy and other consumables
- Use of biodegradable chemicals
- Minimising use of solvents and lead-based paints
- Encouraging electronic communication to reduce usage of paper and printing
- Use of timber from sustainable (managed) forests
- Procedures to minimise noise disturbance to neighbours
- Phasing out of hazardous substances.

Business is linked to key customers and stakeholders - environmental policy statements will reflect their requirements and needs - including cost savings.

7. Checklist of statements for the draft policy

- Comply with the requirements of environmental legislation and approved codes of practice
- Assess the environmental impact of all operations
- Continuously seek to reduce costs and improve environmental performance
- Reduce pollution, emissions and waste
- Reduce the use of all raw materials, energy and supplies
- Raise awareness and train employees in environmental matters
- Expect similar environmental standards from all suppliers and contractors
- Assist customers to use services in an environmentally-sensitive way
- Liaise with the local community
- Participate in discussions about environmental issues
- Review of the policy on an annual basis

For a free informal preliminary discussion contact Martin Smith

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