



Environmental Policy Guidance

What is an Environmental Policy?

An environmental policy is a written statement, signed by senior management, which outlines an organization's goals and principles in relation to managing the environmental effects and aspects of its operations. Having an environmental policy is essential if you want to implement an environmental management standard such as ISO 14001. It's also vital if you currently work or intend to work with large organizations, or if you need to demonstrate to customers and other stakeholders that you are committed to managing your environmental impacts in a responsible way.

Environmental Policy Format

There is no standard format for writing an environmental policy, but to give it the best chance of success, it's important you plan it carefully. For your policy to be successful you need to get support from management.

Once you have secured this support, it's a good idea to assess where your business currently stands in terms of environmental management. This could include drawing up an environmental history of your business, its impact and the risks faced by it.

You could also carry out a benchmarking exercise to establish how you compare against similar businesses.

It's important to tailor your environmental policy to reflect your business and its culture. A good starting point is to collect and review examples of policies written by other businesses and select the format and style most appropriate to your own business. However, avoid copying someone else's policy.

There are a few basic rules to follow:

- Keep the statement short - if it's longer than two pages then it's probably too long
- The policy is meant for everyone to see, so make sure it's easy to read and understand.
- The policy must be realistic, achievable and relevant to your company's activities and practices.



- Demonstrate commitment to making the policy work and get the statement signed, dated and endorsed by the owner, managing director or other senior manager
- Make the policy publicly available.
- Require new employees and suppliers to read a copy of the policy.

Environmental Policy Content

There is no standard content for an environmental policy, although policies normally contain the same themes. Bear in mind that your policy should be personal to your business, and as such reflect the activities, priorities and concerns most relevant to it.

Before you write your policy, you should assess which aspects of your business affect the environment and what the potential impacts are. The content of your policy should be based on the results of your assessment, which should have identified the key issues that apply to your business.

Your policy should contain brief statements on the following criteria:

- The business mission and information about its operations. Bear in mind that if your business activities or operations change significantly, the policy may need to be amended.
- A commitment to continually improve your environmental performance.
- A commitment to effectively manage your significant environmental impacts.
- The expectations that your business has in relation to external parties such as suppliers and contractors.
- Recognition that you will demonstrate compliance with relevant environmental regulations as a minimum level of performance.
- Education and training of employees in environmental issues and the environmental effects of their activities.
- Monitoring progress and reviewing environmental performance against targets and objectives on a regular basis (usually annually or in the first six months initially). See the page in this guide on how to keep your environmental policy up to date.
- A commitment to communicate your business' environmental aims and objectives to all staff, as well as to customers, investors and other external stakeholders.



If your business is linked closely to key customers through the supply chain, obtain a copy of their environmental policy, so that your statements can reflect their requirements and needs.

Your policy should demonstrate commitment by senior management and is usually signed by the chairman or chief executive.

You may want to integrate your environmental policy with other policies such as health & safety or quality management.

Environmental Policy Practices

The list below may help you to draft a policy appropriate to your business. Choose examples of the statements that apply to your business and make the statements as specific as possible for your operations:

- Comply with environmental regulations and other requirements, such as approved codes of practice.
- The importance of environmental issues to your business.
- Assess the environmental impact of all historic, current, and likely future operations.
- Continually seek to improve environmental performance, e.g. by doing a regular walk-around survey of your business to see if you are using energy and water efficiently and whether measures to reduce waste and pollution are effective.
- Reduce waste, energy, water, and pollution (emissions) from your business activities.
- Reduce the use of all raw materials, energy and supplies.
- Raise awareness, encourage participation and train employees in environmental matters.
- Expect similar environmental standards from all suppliers and contractors.
- Assist customers to use products and services in an environmentally sensitive way.
- Liaise with the local community, participate in discussions about environmental issues.
- Communicate environmental aims and objectives to employees and external stakeholders.
- Agree to commit to environmental principles and continual improvement at the highest level in your business.



Keep Your Environmental Policy Up To Date

To check that your company's current activities still comply with your environmental policy, it's a good idea to carry out a regular review - usually on an annual basis, or in the first six months initially. These are key to ensuring that there is continual improvement in environmental performance and that more specific environmental targets are set on a yearly basis. Bear in mind that if your business activities or operations change significantly, the policy may need to be amended.

If your policy is not kept up to date, and it is not backed up with some form of environmental improvement (such as a formal environmental management system or less formal program of improvements), other organizations may think that you're not taking your environmental responsibilities seriously. Consequently, they may decide to take their business elsewhere.

Similarly, if your policy says that you are taking your environmental responsibilities seriously but you fail to back this up, you may face questions over the quality of operations in other parts of your business. This could tarnish your reputation with customers and suppliers.

It's a good idea to involve employees in the reviewing process. If employees are expected to deliver on environmental policy commitments, they may be a good source of ideas for improvements. The environmental policy should be available for all new employees to read and to all existing employees if it changes significantly.