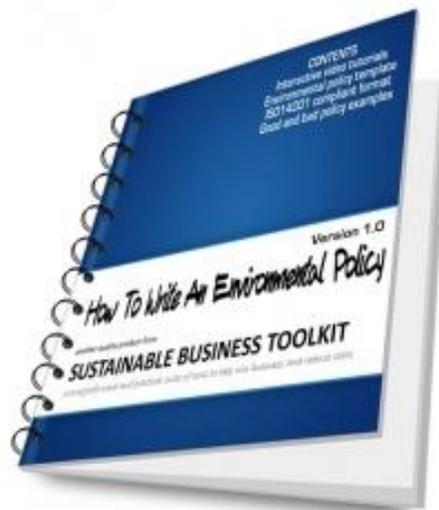


How to write an environmental policy

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INTRODUCTION

Having a robust and relevant environmental policy is a must in today's competitive market. A good environmental policy can set you apart from your competitors and help you respond to environmental questions in tenders. However, knowing where to start and what to do can be confusing.

The purpose of an environmental policy is to set the tone and direction for your organization's commitment to improved environmental performance. As such it should be a living document that is widely communicated internally and externally.

Following the guidance provided in this document will help you write an effective environmental policy for your organization. Let's get started!

BENEFITS OF WRITING AN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

A well written environmental policy should resonate with your staff and impress your customers. It may sound unlikely, but I have seen well thought out environmental policies drive real value in an organization. Through the process of implementing an environmental policy you can help reduce costs in your business and also win business. Here are the main reasons why you should consider writing an environmental policy.

1. Be able to respond confidently to environmental questions in tenders. Attach your policy and any supporting environmental documentation to impress and assure your customers
2. Illustrate clearly and succinctly to your staff that you take your environmental responsibility seriously. Most staff want to work for a responsible employer. A great environmental policy sends the right message to staff and demonstrates a positive approach which will encourage improved levels of motivation / productivity!
3. Set a clear direction for your organizations environmental performance that drives triple-bottom line benefits in terms of environmental, social and economic outcomes

Sustainability is about long-term value creation - this requires a relentless focus on all aspects that drive value in your organization. An environmental policy should sit within the context of value creation - what's good for the environment is good for business in the long-term

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY TIPS

Below I have outlined 8 top tips that you can use when writing your environmental policy. Remember the more relevant you make your policy the more impact it will have in your organization.

1. State who you are and what you do - it sounds obvious but you will be surprised how many companies do not mention who they are or what line of business they are in. The result is a very generic policy that procurement bodies can see directly through
2. Highlight what has been achieved thus far. You could include any environmental awards or certifications (i.e. ISO14001) here. It is always more compelling if you use facts and figures to illustrate your achievements - i.e. we reduced our carbon footprint from x tonnes to y tonnes of CO₂e in the past year
3. If you are aware of environmental legislation that impacts your business, state that your company complies with these regulations. Be explicit - i.e. we comply with the EU packaging waste directive
4. State your main commitment or environmental objective and in doing so recognise that your activities have an impact that can be reduced to achieve that commitment. For example: we recognise that as a widget factory our activities have an impact on the environment. As a business that strives for excellence our overall environmental objective is to reduce our waste and emissions per tonne of product
5. State what actions or how you aim to achieve that objective. Here you can list the actions that may already be underway or highlight the actions you are going to undertake over the next year. Example actions include - reduce waste consumption by 10%; measure our carbon footprint; implement a recycling scheme; switch all our lights to energy efficient alternatives
6. State clearly how your policy will be communicated to staff and customers. For example, all staff are made aware of our environmental policy through their employee handbooks. In addition we display our policy on our company website and in our office reception
7. State when the policy will be reviewed and how. A good rule of thumb is that a policy should be reviewed annually and actions added and removed where relevant
8. Ensure the policy is signed by the managing director and dated. Senior commitment to a policy is critical if the objectives and actions are to be achieved

AN EXAMPLE OF A BAD ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

XYZ Inc. Environmental Policy

XYZ Inc. recognises that its activities and products are capable of having a significant impact on the environment.

To address these possible impacts, the company will:

- Consider ways of demonstrating commitment to comply with environmental legislation where practical
- Aim to formulate products, which are environmentally friendly in use and have minimal impact regarding waste disposal or accidental spillage
- Take account of concerns of interested parties such as regulators, shareholders, the public, etc. where these are consistent with the financial success of the company
- Totally eliminate all forms of pollution from the company's activities and products
- Minimise the use of energy and raw materials to reduce waste
- Ensure that key employees are aware of this policy and trained in their environmental responsibilities
- Regularly review environmental performance and set targets to achieve continuous improvement

This Policy Statement is designed to meet the requirements of BS EN ISO 14001, to which the company intend to be accredited as soon as possible.

Signed

A. N. Other
Sales Director

WHY IS THIS ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY POOR?

1. The policy doesn't say who XYZ Inc is or what they do. Because of this the policy is rendered so general that it could apply to any company
2. The language used is very reactive - 'we'll consider', 'possible impacts', 'where practical'
3. Unrealistic - 'totally eliminate all forms of pollution'
4. Not specific enough - 'set targets to achieve continuous improvement' - what are the targets?
5. It states that the company aims to comply with ISO14001, but the environmental policy does not in any way demonstrate this
6. It is signed by the sales director - it should be signed by the managing director and it should also be dated

AN EXAMPLE OF A GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

XYZ Inc. Environmental Policy Statement

XYZ Inc. is a not for profit co-operative providing support services to its shareholder members in the widget industry. The provision of marketing tools, including eMarketing, hard copy catalogues and promotional flyers is allied to supplier pricing negotiation, conference facilitation and general business consultancy.

XYZ Inc. recognise that environmental degradation and climate change is a serious global problem. As a business we are committed to minimising our impact on the environment and climate. To meet this goal we aim to reduce our carbon footprint by 20% within 3 years from our current measured footprint of 150 tonnes of CO₂e. In addition, as we are a membership organisation our key member goal is to ensure that all our stakeholders improve their environmental performance as well. To achieve this goal we provide bespoke environmental training and guidance to our members.

Specifically, our environmental objectives are to:

1. Reduce our carbon footprint by 5-8% this year
2. Implement a comprehensive waste management programme to increase our office recycling rate to 75%
3. Communicate with our members what our targets are and encourage them to reduce their impact on the environment
4. Work with our suppliers to present our environmental actions and encourage their compliance with our environmental expectations
5. Work closely with our landlord to help reduce their energy usage and thus work towards our target

We have set out these objectives in our environmental action plan which is communicated to our staff, members and suppliers through use of our website, intranet and posting on our environmental action board in our office. In addition, this policy is published and shown in reception areas, in general communications and on our website.

To ensure that we deliver great environmental results we have setup an internal green group consisting of key members of the office team. The green team is responsible for the implementation of our environmental action plan.

Here's to improved environmental performance!

A N Other
Managing Director
September 2011

LANGUAGE DO'S AND DON'TS

The choice of language and tone in your policy is important. Here are some words that you should and shouldn't use when writing your environmental policy.

Don't use reactive language like...

We'll consider...

We'll try...

We will attempt to...

We plan to think about doing...

We will endeavour...

Do use proactive language...

We will do x, y and z

We will test...

We'll ensure...

We'll change...

We can do...

We'll investigate...

FINAL REMARKS

To conclude, I would just like to re-iterate a few key things to remember when writing your environmental policy.

1. Keep it clear and relevant
2. Keep it short - one A4 page is the right length
3. Keep it up-to-date. Refresh your policy once a year
4. Use positive and proactive language - improving your environmental performance is a good thing so tell a positive story!
5. Use in-house language that reflects your organisational culture - if you are a media organisation keep it trendy and fun; if you are a law firm keep it straightforward and structured