



Smart Office Toolkit – Compiling an Environmental Policy

What is an environmental policy?

An environmental or sustainability policy is a **formal commitment** from a company or organisation about its **approach** towards the environment in which it operates. It is the cornerstone of its intent to reduce **resource consumption** (e.g. water, energy, paper) and **waste generation** (solid waste, air or water pollution, and carbon emissions), with the aim to increase **positive impact** on people and the natural environment.



Different documents need to interlink and support each other:

- The **strategy** provides the overall plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim.
- The **policy** is the foundation and formal commitment of the organisation.
- The **action plan** provides specific actions and targets.
- The **monitoring and evaluation** allows to track progress.

Why develop an environmental policy?

Obtaining **top level buy-in and support** is essential, and this can be done through your environmental policy. A clear and simple policy can **provide direction** on what is required and should be signed off by your leadership team. Improving your organisation's environmental performance has numerous **benefits**, including creating a healthier, safer workplace, improving your bottom line and enhancing your brand reputation.

What is the best structure?

- The policy document should be **compact** and **easy to understand**, preferably a one-pager containing key commitments.
- It is important to identify and address the **key objectives** or **material (significant/important) issues** that are relevant to your organisation, considering how your organisation's activities impact on the environment and how to reduce those impacts.
- It should be **signed by the leadership team** to demonstrate that it is a company policy. It should be reviewed from time to time to ensure it is still relevant.

What should the policy contain?

Although there are no legal requirements or standard frameworks for an environmental policy, there are key areas that such a policy should contain. It should indicate the **key objectives** and how these can be achieved, as well as who is ultimately **accountable**.

The material issues that affect your business, or which your business might have an impact on, should be included, such as:

- procurement of goods and services
- resource efficiency, such as water, energy and supplies
- waste management and pollution control
- travel and accommodation
- reduction of carbon emissions
- monitoring and continuous improvement.

Many policies state the general actions or guiding principles that will be used to implement this commitment. The following could be included:

- commitment to protect the environment (preferably through pollution prevention)
- commitment to comply with existing legislation
- commitment to communicate the policy to all employees
- commitment to continuous improvement
- a framework for setting and reviewing environmental goals
- identification of the person responsible for implementing and updating the policy.

Communicating your policy

The key to making sure that the policy works in your organisation is to ensure that everyone is aware of it. Once a policy has been developed, it should be communicated to all employees of the organisation. You may also wish to communicate the policy to your customers/clients. Some ideas for doing this are posting the policy in a front office or behind a sales counter, or including all or parts of it in corporate communication such as brochures and on your website.

A final note

An environmental policy should not be a static document. It should be reviewed and updated periodically to ensure that it remains relevant as the business grows and changes over the years. However, it is good to have it publicly displayed, so that everybody knows what the policy is and what is expected from them. Remember to ensure that it is signed off by the leadership team.

Good luck with compiling your own environmental policy.

For examples of environmental policies, visit www.capetown.gov.za/smartoffice.