ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

As you may already know, all businesses in the UK, from offices, shops, restaurants, factories, to goods delivery providers or farmers, are legally obliged to meet environmental laws.

Being a sustainable, green business is crucial to maintaining brand reputation.

As the famous American businessman Warren Buffett once said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it."

This factsheet will help you understand your obligations in relation to environmental laws and maintain a sustainable and reputable business.

ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS

Every day, Earth faces environmental threats caused by human activity.

Environmental concerns range from the biggies – like climate change and pollution, to less publicised concerns like loss of biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, or statutory nuisances.

Climate change

Pollution

Loss of biodiversity (both fauna and flora)

Depletion of natural resources (water, gas, oil, trees)

As you might have guessed, the biggest environmental risk is the increase in the Earth's average surface temperature caused by greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide and methane, otherwise known as global warming.

Irresponsible disposal of waste is another big environmental risk.

Environmental issues have put in danger all fauna and flora on Earth, pushing some species to the brink of extinction.

Sustainability is no longer an option – it is a necessity!

It is also a legal requirement.

POLLUTION

So, how does pollution affect the environment?

Well, it depends on what is being polluted.

Most pollutants come from industrial activity, oil production, transport and logistics. Fumes from vehicles and smoke from factories are responsible for high emissions of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases. Collectively, the total amount of greenhouse gases produced to support a human activity is known as its carbon footprint.

Did you know that the clothing industry is one of the top global polluters? Hazardous chemicals are released during the making of clothes. In addition, the clothing industry involves complex chains of production, resourcing raw materials, textile manufacturing, shipping, retail and disposal of the used garments.

Industrial activity, construction and civil engineering are main causes of noise pollution, leading to partial or complete deafness and psychological health issues.

Light pollution affects the natural cycles of people, animals and plants.

Chemical and/or oil spillages and irresponsible waste disposal are the main causes of water and land pollution.

LEGAL AND CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATIONS

Ok, you know about environmental risks, so now it's time to learn how to protect the environment.

So, what's the legal situation when it comes to environment protection?
Under the Environment Act 1995, environmental laws in England and Wales are regulated by the Environment Agency. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency regulates the laws for Scotland, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs governs Northern Ireland.

THE SCOTTISH ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AGENCY

THE DEPARTMENT FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

THE ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Another piece of legislation you should know about is the Environmental Protection Act 1990. It regulates waste management, sets limits on emissions to the environment and specifies when littering becomes an offence.

In addition, The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 covers employer and employee obligations towards a safe and sustainable work environment.
Whether you are an employer or an employee, you also have a corporate liability for environmental damage. Businesses are liable for breaching environmental rules under many different laws, including: criminal, civil, public, administrative, or company law.

For example, if a company has polluted public water supplies by deliberate or neglectful disposal of chemicals, they will face criminal charges.

Company directors and officers can be prosecuted if the criminal offence was committed with their consent or connivance, or was attributable to their neglect. This is known as corporate criminal liability.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

So, as you have learnt, businesses have a corporate responsibility to protect the environment. This involves:

• Having a clear environmental policy and following a plan – do – check – act cycle for controlling and continuously improving environmental performance.

• You should carry out regular risk assessments on your environmental impact. Once you know the risks, plan and implement preventative measures and review your procedures regularly.

• Employees should be trained on environmental risks and sustainability.

There are numerous ways in which businesses can help protect the environment.

First of all, they should have a clear environmental policy and assess and manage environmental risks.

They should also use energy and resources responsibly and manage waste efficiently.

Businesses that deliver goods to customers should explore sustainable product packaging options.

If your business stores oil or deals with hazardous waste, you should ensure that these substances are stored and disposed of responsibly to avoid spillages or land contamination.

Do whatever you can to protect our wildlife and the countryside.

Typically, an environmental policy will look like this:

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

OUR MAIN OBJECTIVES AND COMMITMENTS TOWARDS PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THIS YEAR ARE:

REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS BY 10% THROUGH BETTER MANAGEMENT OF COMPANY VEHICLES AND REDUCING ENERGY USE.

REDUCE AIR POLLUTION BY PROMOTING ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORT OPTIONS WHERE FEASIBLE.

REDUCE WATER CONSUMPTION BY 30% BY INSTALLING DUAL FLUSH TOILETS AND FIXING INEFFICIENT PUSH TAP BUTTONS ON SINKS.

IMPROVE ENERGY EFFICIENCY BY REGULAR MAINTENANCE AND BETTER CONTROL OF AIR-CONDITIONING DEVICES, ROOF INSULATION AND INSTALLING ENERGY EFFICIENT LIGHTING (LED LIGHTS).

MANAGE WASTE BY REDUCING, REUSING, RECYCLING AND DISPOSING OF WASTE AND PACKAGING RESPONSIBLY.
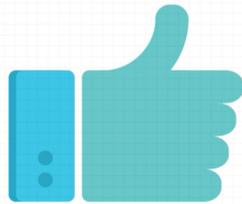
LOWER NOISE POLLUTION BY INSTALLING DESK CUBICLES AND SUPPLYING HEADSETS TO STAFF WHO FREQUENTLY MAKE TELEPHONE AND VIDEO-CONFERENCE CALLS.

MANAGE GREEN SPACES TO PROMOTE BIODIVERSITY.

TRAIN STAFF TO UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Some companies implement and maintain various management systems to help them manage their quality and environmental programmes in a comprehensive, systematic, planned and documented manner.

Setting achievable targets, risk assessment & management, appropriate remedial actions, continuous improvement and staff training lie at the heart of all management systems.

ISO 14001: 2015

Environmental management system 14000 and its ISO 14001: 2015 standard provides a structured framework enabling companies to run a green and sustainable business and to ensure that all employees have environmental awareness.

ENERGY AND RESOURCES

You might ask, "Why is living green such a big deal?"

Well, the truth is that we have been exploiting natural resources like water, oil or gas relentlessly for centuries and, unfortunately, they are finite.

As our population explodes globally, we use more and more energy to heat, light and power homes and businesses. Our vital water resources are already under pressure and some river flows could fall by as much as 35% by 2050 as population and climate change pressures bite.

Imagine a world of soaring food prices, water shortages and extortionate energy bills. Unless we want to face a global energy crisis, we must act now and take responsibility for our environmental impact.

This is exactly why more and more businesses are investing in solar or wind powered energy, electric cars and other renewable energy sources.

You can also save energy and resources by using them wisely, and minimising and recycling waste. For example, consider running a paper-free office. Don't forget to switch off lights, PCs, chargers and projectors when you leave the office for the day, go out to lunch, or simply don't need them anymore. Avoid wasting water by running tap water or making more and bigger drinks than you need.

RENEWABLE RESOURCES

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As you have learnt, we all have a social responsibility for the environment.

You can do many more things to reduce your impact on the environment when at work.

First of all, follow the health and safety procedures and environmental guidelines set out by your employer.

If your company has a quality or environmental management system in place, liaise with the designated quality manager for the relevant procedures and guidelines.

There are three simple steps you can take to reduce and manage the amount of waste you generate:

1. **Reduce**
2. **Reuse**
3. **Recycle**

OIL AND MATERIALS STORAGE

Next, we are going to discuss how to store materials and oil.

All materials must be clearly labelled and stored safely, particularly if they contain hazardous substances.

Your oil storage container must have a sticker in a prominent position that tells you how to look after your oil and what to do if you have a spill.

Ensure your oil storage container is inspected every year by a registered professional.

You may need an environmental permit to store certain waste oils. Check the GOV.uk website for details.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

This is your 'duty of care' and it applies to anyone who produces, imports, transports, stores, treats or disposes of controlled waste from businesses or industries.

Remember: it's illegal to mix a hazardous waste with non-hazardous materials or another hazardous waste.

So, what constitutes business or commercial waste?

Well, it is waste from any commercial activity, including one you run from your home.

Now, how do I dispose of commercial waste?

First of all, you should reduce waste by reusing, recycling or recovering waste. Remember to sort and store waste safely and securely.

Also, complete a waste transfer note for each load of waste that leaves your premises.

And, make sure you use registered carriers, authorised to dispose of waste.

Report the waste carrier to Crimestoppers or the Environmental Agency if you believe they dispose of your waste illegally. If you are not in a position to do it yourself, report the case to your line manager, the health and safety or quality manager in your company.

And don't forget, you have extra responsibilities if you're dealing with hazardous waste.

REPORTING INCIDENTS

Finally, let's talk about reporting incidents. As an employee, you have a duty to report all accidents, spills or signs of pollution to the H&S officer or the designated environmental management representative.

Remember to report immediately any spills of potentially hazardous liquids or solid materials, oil leaks from vehicles or machinery, and fly-tipping.

REPORTING INCIDENTS

So, you have reached the end of this environmental awareness factsheet. We really hope you have enjoyed it and you have learnt something new. Before you finish, let's just run a short summary of what the course covered.

We talked about how the various pieces of legislation govern environmental protection.

We learnt that anyone breaching environmental laws may face criminal liability, hefty fines and imprisonment.

We discussed the fact that all businesses have a corporate responsibility to protect the environment and demonstrated examples of how this can be done.

We also talked about our responsibility as employees and individuals to care for the environment, and we showed the financial benefits of doing so.

We showed that even small and insignificant actions matter.

SUMMARY

Remember to:
REDUCE, REUSE AND RECYCLE.

Whether you work for a big corporation or a small business always remember to reduce, reuse and recycle all materials and waste.

Thanks for taking the time to read about environmental awareness. If you need any further information on the topic please speak to your line manager who is there to help.