

An Environmental Policy sets out an organisation's environmental direction, intentions and values. The international Environmental Management System (EMS) standard ISO 14001 defines an Environmental Policy as:

*“A statement of the overall intentions and direction of an organisation related to its environmental performance as formally expressed by top management. The environmental policy provides a framework for action and for the setting of environmental objectives and environmental targets”.*

It is important to recognise the difference between policy and strategy. Strategy is a systematic plan of action. Policy is more of a guiding principle. Strategic techniques should be used to implement the policy.

The policy “provides a framework for action and for the setting of its environmental objectives and targets”. This means that the policy should facilitate the establishment of a structure or plan to meet its objectives, but not necessarily detail it within the policy. Specific objectives and targets may be part of a separate document, although certain aspects or long-term aims should be evident in the policy. Have a look on line at the policies of other businesses in your sector, but don't copy them or use a template, it is important to write a policy that is relevant to your organisation.

The difference between an Environmental Policy and a Sustainability Policy is that a Sustainability Policy may also include references to social, ethical and economic commitments, such as volunteering or specifying local suppliers

## What to include in your Environmental Policy

Although there is no standard format for writing an Environmental Policy, there are three things that you should commit to:

1. Compliance with environmental legislation
2. Prevention of pollution
3. Continuous improvement

In addition, there are a few basic rules to follow to ensure clarity:

- Keep it short - if it's longer than a sheet of A4, then it's probably too long
- Introduce the business and state the overall aim of the policy
- Describe the significant environmental impacts of the business
- Get the policy signed, dated and endorsed by the Managing Director or Chief Executive
- Include the name of the person to contact with any queries
- Make it available to employees, customers and the public. Put it on your website, in your reception area and include it in marketing material and tenders
- State that you will review the policy annually to make sure it is still relevant

Policy Traps – You'll be discovered! Things to avoid:

- Setting aspirations or making claims that are open to misinterpretation, can't be substantiated, or can't be achieved: e.g. becoming carbon neutral or producing zero waste
- Making promises that cannot be kept
- Committing to underachievement to avoid failure
- Using non-committal language like 'where possible', 'where practicable' or 'we aim to'
- Creating 'smoke screens' for difficult issues