

Guide from

[insert your firm’s name here]

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[Insert a line about your business here]

**Essential guide to reducing pollution and waste**

For many businesses, pollution and waste are among the most important environmental impacts – and ones that can be relatively easy to control. Reducing pollution and waste helps you cut costs and improve your reputation, leading to significant increases in profitability.

You must comply with your legal obligations to control pollution and waste, but you should do more – reducing them as much as you can. Where possible, you should try to avoid producing waste or pollution in the first place. If you can't do this, you'll want to look for better ways of dealing with them, such as recycling waste or treating trade effluent.

**1. Your approach to pollution and waste**

**Get organised**

* Decide who will be responsible for managing your business' pollution and waste.
* Include pollution and waste management in your overall environmental management strategy.
* Taking a systematic approach improves the effectiveness of your environmental management. It can also help you attract customers who require their suppliers to meet a recognised standard.

**Arrange advice and help**

* WRAP offers guidance on improving resource efficiency and [reducing waste](https://wrap.org.uk/) throughout your business.
* The Carbon Trust offers guidance to help you [reduce your carbon footprint](https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/the-journey-to-net-zero-for-smes) and wasted energy.

**Review your legal obligations**

* You have a legal duty of care to ensure that any waste you produce is properly stored and disposed of. This includes all commercial, industrial and household wastes (including hazardous).
* You must comply with clean air legislation and other restrictions on harmful emissions and water contamination. You are also responsible for cleaning up any land and water contamination that you cause.
* If you use packaging or sell products that are packaged, you must minimise the amount of packaging, ensure it can be reused or recycled and avoid high levels of heavy metals in it.
* If you have a turnover of more than £2 million and handle more than 50 tonnes of packaging a year, you must register with your environmental regulator or an approved compliance scheme and recycle and recover specific amounts of the waste.
* If you produce, sell or use waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) such as household appliances, tools, or heating, cooling and lighting equipment, you must follow WEEE rules on disposing of it and keep proof that you have given it to an authorised waste-management company.
* Noise and smells can also be seen as pollution if they cause a nuisance.
* You may face legal action if your emissions or waste cause a nuisance to your neighbours.

**Make sure you have the right environmental permits**

* These have replaced the various types of written authorisation such as licences and consents.
* You need a permit if you transport or carry out waste activities for other people, such as storing, treating or disposing of it. You also need a permit if you produce hazardous waste or keep or dispose of radioactive substances.
* Special rules also apply to waste batteries, animal by-products, food waste, old vehicles and hazardous waste.
* You need a permit to get rid of anything other than clean water into surface waters (eg a pond) or groundwater, or to get rid of liquid waste into sewers.
* You need a permit if you use a lot of local water from surface waters or groundwater.

**Assess the benefits you can expect**

* Reducing pollution and waste can help you reduce costs, build your reputation with customers, motivate employees and attract investment.
* An effective waste-reduction initiative reduces costs for a typical business by around 1% of turnover. Marketing opportunities and other benefits from improved performance could be much higher.
* Understanding the potential benefits helps you decide how much time and money to invest in waste and pollution reduction and where to focus your efforts.

**2. Review the waste you produce**

**Look around your premises for signs of waste**

* Assess what is going into each bin, skip and drain. Waste typically includes raw materials, packaging and extras such as cleaning products, lubricants (such as oils) and consumables.
* Check for indications of energy going to waste: for example, open doors, or steam coming from a production process. Check temperatures in both heated and cooled areas.
* As well as obvious waste such as leaks, identify all the activities that use water. There may well be opportunities to reduce levels of water usage and effluent production.
* Check at different times of the day and at weekends. For example, are you lighting or heating vacant premises overnight?

**Work with your employees, suppliers and waste-disposal contractors**

* Ask employees to identify unnecessary waste and for suggestions how to make reductions. Training and motivating employees to play their part in reducing waste and pollution will be a key part of any solution.
* Ask suppliers to keep you up to date with new materials and technologies that will let you reduce waste, switch to less hazardous substances, cut emissions or use less energy.
* Talk to your waste-disposal contractors about the services they provide and how you can cut waste-disposal volumes and treatment costs.

**Identify key opportunities to make improvements**

* Use your records and utility bills to estimate the inputs (such as raw materials, water and energy), outputs and waste for each main activity. You may need help from your advisers to assess complex industrial processes.
* Use records of products damaged in storage or rejected by customers to help you assess the waste caused by errors.
* Use cost records, including costs of waste disposal, to identify the activities with the highest waste costs.
* Ask your advisers for benchmark information to help you compare your waste performance with best practice in your sector. Tracking changing waste levels over time can also help you identify problem areas.

**Schedule the next review**

* Regular reviews allow you to monitor the effectiveness of the steps you have taken and identify new weaknesses to address.
* You may need separate reviews if you start using new equipment, materials or ways of working, or get involved in new activities.

**Consider broader reviews of the environmental impact of your business**

* You can include your waste and pollution reviews in these.

**3. Eliminate unnecessary waste**

**Minimise office waste and travel**

* Use email instead of paper communications when possible. Post information on a company intranet instead of circulating copies.
* Ensure emails and other documents are not printed out unnecessarily.
* Use double-sided printing and photocopying.
* Use power-management software to automatically turn computers off when they are not in use.
* Invest in more efficient technologies – such as server consolidation and virtualisation – to reduce IT hardware requirements and energy use.
* Consider introducing homeworking – reducing your office space, furniture requirements and journeys to and from work.
* Consider running a green travel plan for staff and reducing unnecessary commuting.

**Minimise production waste**

* Ensure equipment is properly set up and maintained for optimum efficiency.
* Keep up to date with new technologies. Replace old equipment where improved performance justifies the investment.
* Investigate whether production processes can be redesigned to reduce off-cuts and errors.
* Optimise batch runs to eliminate unnecessary waste (eg cleaning, purging and other forms of start-up and shut-down waste).

**Avoid unnecessary hazardous waste**

* See whether you can use less hazardous materials instead: for example, cleaning using detergent rather than solvents.

**Minimise packaging**

* Eliminate unnecessary packaging, and design packaging to minimise wastage (such as offcuts).
* Work with customers to use or create reusable transport packaging, rather than packaging that they recycle or discard.

**Avoid stock and product waste**

* Store raw materials, stock and finished goods safely, to eliminate breakages and spills.
* Rotate stock (first in, first out) to avoid stock deteriorating.

**Reduce energy use**

* Use natural light and ventilation when possible.
* Turn down heating thermostats. Use timers and automated controls to avoid unnecessary heating, lighting and power use.
* Ensure that premises are effectively insulated. Avoid heat loss through open doors and windows.
* Consider providing localised heating (eg of water) rather than having long, wasteful piperuns from a central boiler.

**Cut water losses**

* Reducing water pressure can reduce leaks and overall water usage.
* Use low flow-rate taps and low-flush toilets.
* Avoid unnecessary or excessive automated processes (eg urinals flushing at night).
* Fit automated cutoffs on taps and hoses.

**4. Manage unavoidable waste**

**Stream different types of waste**

* Keep different kinds of waste separate to make it easier to treat each type of waste in the most effective way. For example, provide separate bins for waste paper.

**Reuse waste if possible**

* Reuse or return packaging used to deliver supplies to you.
* Refill toner and ink cartridges rather than discarding them, reuse scrap paper for notes.
* See whether you can reuse returned goods, or at least some of the components.
* Consider refurbishing and selling old equipment, or dismantling it for parts, rather than discarding it.

**See whether other organisations can use your waste**

* Local businesses may be able to use your waste as a raw material. Regional waste exchanges can help you find potential partners.
* Old equipment and furnishings can be donated to local charities.

**Recycle waste that cannot be reused**

* Common materials that can be recycled include paper, cardboard, glass, textiles, metals, wood and cooking oil.
* Waste electrical and electronic equipment must be recycled. Equipment producers offer recycling schemes.
* Your waste-disposal contractor may offer recycling services. In some cases, these may include free collections or even payment for recyclable materials.

**Find the best disposal method**

* Possibilities may include composting, or sending the waste to a recovery plant.
* Landfill should only be used as a last resort.
* Your waste disposal contractor can advise you on the services they offer, and what steps you can take to minimise waste going to landfill.

**Apply a similar approach to minimising water waste**

* Aim to minimise water waste and contamination in the first place through better process design.
* Look for ways to reuse waste water in any production processes that do not require completely clean water.
* Investigate whether it is possible to treat effluent onsite.
* Check your options for disposing of liquid waste through your waste contractor rather than discharging effluent.
* Simply diluting contaminated water is not an acceptable or cost-effective way of treating effluent.

**5. Control pollution**

**Identify all the potential sources of pollution in your business**

* Review which processes use or produce environmentally harmful substances, including trade effluent.

**Assess what pollution you produce**

* Check for obvious signs, such as visible emissions, smells or noise coming from your premises.
* Check that you are using effective storage. Check that storage of harmful substances such as oils and pesticides meets specific regulatory requirements.
* Review storage areas for any signs of leaks, overflows or poor maintenance and working practices.
* Check that waste is stored and handled securely. If necessary, take advice on handling hazardous wastes.

**Review how water flows through your premises**

* Check which drains are connected to the sewerage system, and which are surface water drains that allow water to flow to local surface waters or groundwater.
* Ensure that trade effluent cannot enter surface water drains.
* Check how rainwater flows through your premises, whether it can become contaminated, and which drains it ends up in.

**Check any relevant records**

* Check the terms of any environmental permit, authorisation to discharge water or consent for trade effluent.

**Identify ways of reducing pollution**

* Consider whether you could use less risky processes or materials to reduce the risk of contamination in the first place.
* Carry out regular maintenance of equipment and pipework to minimise the risk of leaks.
* Get advice from your environmental regulator, particularly if your business involves environmentally hazardous substances. If necessary, use a consultant.

**Take into account potential disasters**

* Assess the potential consequences of a disaster: for example, a flood or the catastrophic failure of a piece of equipment (eg a storage tank).
* Ensure that you have adequate security to reduce the risk from accidents or vandalism.
* Provide absorbent material and containment equipment to deal with any spills.
* Prepare an emergency plan and ensure that employees have adequate training.

**Signpost**

* Find information on [WRAP funding programmes](https://wrap.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/grants-and-investments) and advice on improving resource efficiency and reducing waste.
* Download [The journey to Net Zero for SMEs](https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/the-journey-to-net-zero-for-smes) guide from the Carbon Trust.
* Read government guidance on [packaging regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/packaging-producer-responsibilities).
* Check if a [waste management organisation](https://environment.data.gov.uk/public-register/view/search-waste-carriers-brokers) is registered with the Environment Agency.
* Find guidance on [Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) recycling](https://www.hse.gov.uk/waste/waste-electrical.htm) from the Health and Safety Executive.
* Find out about [donating old IT equipment](https://www.itforcharities.co.uk/donorinf.htm) to charity on the IT for Charities website.
* Find [Environment Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency/services-information) services and information for businesses in England and Wales (03708 506 506).
* Find [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](https://www.sepa.org.uk) services and information.
* Get information from the [Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk) (0300 200 7852).
* Report an environmental incident on the Environment Agency incident hotline 0800 80 70 60.

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