



Five ways your SME might be harming the planet

Despite harbouring good intentions it's easy to see how small business owners get lost in the day-to-day. Environmental responsibilities can sometimes get lost between juggling planning and strategy, finance and accounting, product development, advertising and sales, all while keeping clients, customers AND staff happy. Thankfully, standards can help.

We've highlighted five ways that your small business may be damaging the planet, and the standards which can help you do something about it.

1. Staying ahead of the game

Every business has a unique environmental impact. So, an independent coffee shop, for example, will have different perspectives to a family-owned scrapyard. Some businesses will naturally have a greater impact than others, as well as differing legislation and regulations to comply with.

SMEs can use standards to save energy, cut costs, reduce environmental impact and prove their commitment to tackling sustainability challenges. The key point here is to go beyond the more obvious elements to think about the bigger picture: look at each element of your daily operations, however seemingly small.

Standards can help you identify how your business might be damaging the planet, understand relevant legislation, and use resources more efficiently to help the environment and your bottom line.

2. Not making a plan

This is a big one. Not having an environmental management plan for your business and instead just relying on ad-hoc measures is not going to cut it. Your plan does not have to be complex – something basic that all your staff understand will make a huge difference to the impact your business has on the environment. It makes consistent, focused and positive environmental action much more likely.

Following on from the training courses we run, there's also a standard designed to help you establish an environmental plan that's unique to your business. ISO 14001 helps you cover every base when it comes to creating your own processes. It prompts you to look at each individual area that could have an environmental impact – including procurement, storage, distribution, product development, manufacturing, unexpected situations and customer service, as well as your relationships



with the local community.

3. Being wasteful

While this might seem obvious, it's actually about focusing on the little details again – the ones we sometimes miss. It's easy enough to spot areas that have a sizeable impact, like the raw materials you use, the energy you consume, the paper in your office or the way you handle your recycling. It takes specific focus to uncover the more subtle ways relating to your team's daily habits and behaviour which might be unnecessarily wasteful. Of course, once you've found them, you'll likely reduce costs too – so it's a win-win for you and the planet.

ISO 14001 helps you tackle the challenge from several angles – both from a cost efficiency and waste disposal perspective, but there are other standards you can use to strengthen your focus in certain areas. For energy management we have ISO 50001. Meanwhile PAS 2060 helps you achieve and prove that your business is carbon neutral.

4. Forgetting about your partners and suppliers

Once you've got a working environmental management system in place it's time to look outside of the business. Your partnerships and supply arrangements say a lot about you,

however small your business (or theirs). Looking for the right environmental credentials and assurances from your suppliers helps you find partners with a similar mindset, while also reflecting on your overall appearance as a brand.

Accreditations and certifications are a powerful indicator, but it's also important to get to know your suppliers to find out how their processes work in practise and the real influence these have on daily operations.

5. Overlooking your social impact

So far, we've highlighted environmental and sustainability challenges, but not mentioned social responsibility. It's not just for big corporates – every business can have a positive impact, and small businesses can make a big difference. If you take the reputation of your business seriously, a policy on social responsibility is a must. Your approach to this influences the way that customers, staff, partners, suppliers, regulators and investors view your small business. Having the right approach can make a real difference to an SME's long-term prospects.

Small businesses can use ISO 26000 to guide their social responsibility efforts. This standard defines seven core aspects of social

responsibility and helps SMEs put these principles into action. It encourages businesses to go beyond basic legal compliance, to address the impact of their operations across all aspects of society, working practices, community and the environment, promoting transparent and ethical behaviour.

Hopefully this has given you pause for thought and outlined how standards can help you to address sustainability issues and improve your social responsibility. Standards, like those above, can also help SMEs grow, improve quality and customer service, win contracts, gain investment and reduce costs. Find out more about how standards can help your business move to the next level.

Summary

- It's easy to get lost in the day-to-day of running an SME, with little time to reflect on the ways in which your business might be impacting the environment. Start by looking at the bigger picture and the issues unique to your individual business.

- A plan is essential. ISO 14001 helps you to establish an environmental plan that is unique to your business and easy for staff to understand and follow, making consistent, focused and positive environmental action much more likely.
- Once you've looked at the bigger picture, it's also important to investigate the more subtle ways in which your business affects the planet. Supporting standards, like ISO 50001 and PAS 2060 can help.
- Work in partnership with your suppliers to improve the sustainability of your business. This is important not only from an environmental perspective, but also from that of cost and brand reputation.
- Don't forget to think about your social responsibility. It's not always easy for SMEs to engage in CSR but having the right approach can make a real difference to an SME's long-term prospects. ISO 26000 can help guide your social responsibility efforts and put them into action.

For more information on our sustainability standards, visit:

www.bsigroup.com/sustainability

