

How to Set Objectives and Targets

Objectives and targets can assist you in implementing your environmental policy and provide milestones towards improved environmental management. There should be no mis-match between the commitments in the policy and those in the objectives. They should cover your significant impacts and meet your commitment to continual improvement (particularly if you are aiming to achieve a formal EMS standard). Objectives will not be met if personnel either do not understand, or do not want to support the goals so it is important to get staff commitment from an early stage and involve them in the process of setting the objectives. Objectives and targets are not static and will need to be reviewed and updated regularly according to progress.

Both the individual 'stepping stone' targets and the overall 'goal' objectives should be SMART:

Specific – The broader the objective the more complex the series of targets needed to address it. Ask yourself 'how will the impact look once the objective has been achieved?'

Measurable – It is important to choose the right environmental performance indicators (see below) for the desired outcome.

Achievable – 'Stretch' goals will encourage high performance to be met, however, unachievable goals will be a disincentive. If you think a 5% reduction is achievable, set it at 10% and see whether staff rise to the challenge.

Realistic – Closely monitor your objectives and targets to assess their success and whether the expected progress is being made.

Time-bound – If you don't set a date you expect the above to be met by, then their impact is lost. Try to set dates that will give results in time for regular management review meetings.

Types of Objectives and Targets

There are different types of objectives and targets. A balanced approach should be taken with a variety of objectives set.

Maintenance and Research

It is possible to set objectives that don't necessarily aim for an improvement. Instead they can either maintain legal compliance or aim for research to be completed on a particular issue. This is useful where there isn't enough information or expertise within the organisation on an environmental impact and a review needs to be undertaken. The review can include work on further monitoring, new measures being taken and further data compiled.

There may be a strong case to set an objective of 'maintenance' or 'sustained compliance' in which the impact is carefully managed and maintained at current legal levels if the impact can not be improved upon or there is not an economic business case to purchase new technology.

This may still require some improvements in management techniques, risk assessment and operational controls. There should also be emergency procedures in place to contain the impact under abnormal circumstances and the risk of accidents needs to be monitored. The legal requirements also need to be monitored for any changes in legislation.

Improvement

Improvement objectives should set out a measurable amount the impact will be improved by. For example: 'To reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 5 per cent over two years from a 1998 baseline'.

Environmental Performance Indicators (EPIs)

EPIs are areas of measurement that can supply information on the amount of progress made towards an overall objective. There are three broad types:

Environmental management indicators

These look at the actions taken within the management functions to realise the objective. They can measure activities such as policy formulation, team meetings, writing action plans etc. These simply measure the intention of the organisation rather than actual reduction of impacts.

Environmental performance indicators

These are appropriate measurements of actual amounts of emissions, discharges, consumption of raw materials and resources and other quantified environmental impacts that are caused by the organisation's activities, services and products.

Environmental condition indicators

These apply to the state of the environment in the locality, region or nationally. It is more effective to work within your local borough as it can be difficult to correlate your activities to national indicators.

Example objectives include:

Waste: To reduce the overall amount of waste produced over the next year by 10% from a 2005 baseline.

Energy: To reduce energy consumption over the next year by 10% from a 2005 baseline.

Water: To reduce water consumption over the next year by 10% from a 2005 baseline.

Transport: To put measures in place for at least 10% of staff to use sustainable travel over the next year from a 2005 baseline.

Purchasing: To increase use of sustainable purchasing policy across 10% of all products and services procured over the next year from a 2005 baseline.