

# Envirowise

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## Turn your environmental responsibilities to your advantage

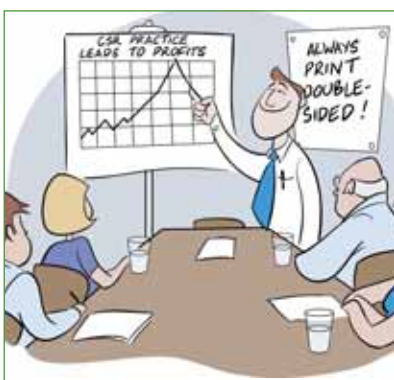
Growing concern about the economic impact of climate change means that businesses in Northern Ireland are increasingly looking to take action to lower their environmental impact. However, although there is a great deal of talk and interest in the topic, local, office-based companies are often unsure about how to ensure they are acting responsibly on environmental issues. Envirowise aims to answer these questions and enable companies taking action on environmental issues to turn these matters to their competitive advantage.



The thought of becoming 'sustainable' could sound daunting to SME businesses in particular, but in reality, any office-based organisation can take straightforward steps to start on the road towards sustainability – and the further they go down this route, the greater potential for cost savings.

## Taking action

Clearly there are compelling reasons why companies should take action to improve their environmental credentials and Envirowise works to make the process easier by providing practical environmental advice.



Envirowise advises companies to be clear about exactly why they are taking action to ensure that the activities of those involved is channelled in the right direction. Envirowise also stresses that the actions taken need to be documented so that they lead to a measurable benefit, as it is crucial to be able to demonstrate the impact of a company's efforts.

In any organisation, there are some people who are simply more open to the idea of increasing sustainable practices than others. Senior management buy-in is essential, but elsewhere it is likely that some staff will fall into the eco-sceptic camp and others into the eco-innovator group – and many somewhere in between.

One way Envirowise advises companies to overcome initial scepticism is to appoint an environmental champion who works to get staff on board, shares news of initiatives and the positive action being taken, and encourage ideas and feedback from the whole workforce, new joiners included.

Research has also shown that almost half of all university students rate the environmental credentials of their future employer as an important consideration, so those companies that actively seek to ►

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boost their green performance stand to gain the most from a skilled graduate pool.

Next, it is a matter of focusing on the areas of the business where simple but effective changes can be made. Implementing even the simplest of environmental initiatives can have a positive effect a company's bottom line. Envirowise recommends local companies look into trying the following:

- Print documents only when necessary and print on both sides of the paper when possible.
- Re-use paper that has only been printed on one side as it can be used for note pads or can be donated to local schools and nurseries.

- Paper-recycling bins should be widely available and clearly labelled.
- Use minimally packaged products and ask suppliers to take excess packaging away with them when they deliver.
- Try to design packaging so that the components can easily be segregated for reuse or recycling.
- Re-use materials such as bubble wrap, boxes, pallets and crates.
- Fill a one-litre plastic milk carton with water, put it in the toilet cistern, and notice the difference in your water bills.
- Push taps can be fitted easily to existing standard tap bodies, and can reduce water use considerably when compared with conventional taps.

Envirowise believes that going for the 'quick wins' of this sort is an important place to start, and can result in noticeable cost savings. But the businesses that will see the healthiest financial and operational advantages will be those that develop a more integrated approach to environmental activity.

One technique is to develop an Environmental Management System (EMS), which is a structured framework for managing and monitoring environmental performance and ensuring compliance with environmental legislation.

It is a flexible internal management tool and companies can choose to either develop their own bespoke system, or follow the requirements of a national or international standard such as ISO14001 or EMAS.

Envirowise has used seminars and events to spread this message and in 2007 demonstrated how businesses operating in the agri-food and drink sector could make savings of up to 25 percent of their total waste management costs by adopting simple, low cost resource efficiency measures. According to Envirowise, UK agri-food and drink companies generate at least 10 percent, 10 million tonnes, of the total waste produced by UK business every year. 'Food Environmental Efficiency Day', sponsored by Envirowise, with support from Invest Northern Ireland, was part of a series of seminars focusing on effective waste management for fruit and vegetable processing companies.

Commenting on the events, Sam McCloskey, Envirowise's NI Country Manager, said: "We have a proven track record in supporting the agri-food and drink sector, having already provided practical help and on-site advice to over 200 companies across Northern Ireland.

By following the advice highlighted at these events, businesses here will be able to make real cost savings, increase their competitiveness and minimize their environmental impact."

### Free help available

Finally, Northern Ireland's businesses should not forget the range of free services that exist to help them embed sustainability into their operations. Envirowise is a programme that provides free and practical, cost-saving advice to businesses of all sizes and sectors, and its advice line (0800 585 794) and website ([www.envirowise.gov.uk](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk)) are ideal places to start.

**Web.** [www.envirowise.gov.uk](http://www.envirowise.gov.uk)  
**Tel.** 0800 585 794

