



Eco-Efficiency Centre

Committed to Excellence and Efficiency

Fact Sheet: Eco-Efficiency and Greening Employees

Introduction

Employee awareness is one of the most important elements for successful implementation of a waste reduction and resource conservation program in a place of business. This specialized education and training helps all employees understand the purpose and benefits of an environmental program and how they can incorporate improvements in their area of responsibility.



Businesses and their employees are large generators of solid and liquid wastes, and large consumers of resources. All businesses should consider implementing an environmental program. To begin a new waste reduction and resource conservation program, it is vital that employees have the opportunity to be involved in the planning of the environmental changes in the operation. This allows any new practices to be designed with their needs in mind.

This fact sheet was prepared by the *Eco-Efficiency Centre* - a non-profit, non-government educational and environmental management support centre for small and medium-sized enterprises in Nova Scotia. The Eco-Efficiency Centre was established in 1998 as a partnership between Dalhousie University and Nova Scotia Power Inc., and is supported by private corporations, governments and foundations. The Centre assists companies to achieve better environmental and economic performance through resource conservation, pollution prevention, recycling, reuse, and general good environmental practices

Eco-Efficiency

What is Eco-Efficiency?

Eco-efficiency is a practical and systematic approach that businesses can adopt in setting and achieving environmental and business performance objectives. It is very closely associated with and complementary to other concepts such as Occupational, Health and Safety (OHS), Total Quality Management (TQM), and Pollution Prevention (also known as source reduction). It involves changing processes, finding alternatives, and reducing or eliminating the generation of toxic wastes instead of dealing with problems of cleanup or disposal after the fact. It also includes extending product liability, enhancing material recyclability and maximizing the use

of renewable resources. Eco-efficiency means doing more with less, creating and providing quality products and services while reducing resource use, waste and pollution along the entire value chain. It is not only about managing waste after it is created, but strives towards preventing and minimizing waste in the first place.

Getting Your Employees Involved

There are many ways of getting employees to participate in a newly established waste reduction and resource conservation program. To help with the implementation of a new program, consider the following steps:

Define Intentions of the Program

- Explain the reasons for adopting an environmental program to the employees.
- Announce top management commitments to reduce waste and your intent to take action. Have the owner or another member of senior management
- Take the time to speak to employees directly about the benefits of the program.
- Keep it simple.
- Remind employees that recycling does not take a large amount of extra effort, as well as being environmentally sound.

Make it Convenient

- Place appropriate signage in work areas and around equipment. Clearly label recycling and organic containers.
- Waste, Recyclable, and Organic material containers should be strategically placed throughout the business. Some professionals recommend getting rid of many regular waste containers to encourage recycling and separation.

Communicate Clearly

- Give employees the opportunity to prepare for a waste reduction program.
- Regular, clear communication of both motivational and operational information to employees is vital to the success of any green office effort.
- All employees must understand which materials should be recycled, composted, and the importance of keeping materials segregated and clean.
- An example of communicating clearly is offering informal information sessions, as they are an effective educational technique.

Encourage Feedback

- Keep asking employees for their suggestions. Add a suggestion box to the lunch room.
- Always give credit and company-wide (and public) recognition to the employees involved.

Keep the Program Alive

- Don't stop communicating after the program is launched. Email or post a tip of the week. Clearly marked containers and signs should always be maintained to act as visual reminders to the employees.
- Send an environmental message or reminder with paychecks.
- Participate in special events for Earth Day, Environment Week, and Waste Reduction Week. Events can range from roadside clean-ups and waste-less barbecues to waste reduction days and car pool events.
- Monitor your progress regularly.

Share Your Progress Results

Share up-to-date information with the employees on a regular basis. Employees want to see the benefits of their efforts to keep motivated.

Share with Your Customers

Include environmental communication on the business web site or post environmental policies in noticeable areas for customers.

Thank Employees

Remind employees that the success of the program is a result of their individual efforts.

Creating Employee Awareness

Creating employee awareness regarding environmental issues is not a hard job if approached in the correct manner. The seven steps below offer assistance with implementing an awareness program in your business:

Form an Awareness Team and Establish Objectives

Include employees from all sections of the business. If you have a 'green team' already in place, select/identify an individual to be responsible for Employee Awareness.

Tips if You Have High Employee Turnover: Are you in Business with a high rate of employee turnover? Consider the following ideas:

- Provide extensive amounts of education and training to all employees. Trips to the composting facility or recycling plant may trigger many employees to become more interested in the program
- To make separation easier, simplify separation procedures as much as possible. This can be achieved by color-coding waste containers, placing them in easy to reach locations, and providing appropriate feedback to employees.
- Let employees help find solution to how the program will run when implemented

Develop a Communications Plan

This type of plan outlines all the issues you need to address to develop an effective employee awareness campaign.

- **Communication Assessment.** How well does your organization communicate with your employees?

- **Target Audiences.** Develop specific activities for each part of the operation.
- **Goals and Objectives.** This allows easier communication with the employees. For example, demonstrate the benefits that can be realized by having a company wide meeting, with employees, to discuss the goals of the program.
- **Challenges.** Defining potential challenges will allow you to anticipate and plan for any 'road blocks'. An example would be reaching those employees that have an overload of work and have limited time to devote themselves to a new program.

Develop Your Tools

- Communication tools should highlight your overall objectives, outline goals, and inform employees with ways of participation.
- Provide staff with information to help achieve your objectives and overcome your challenges. For example, display banners and posters. Include explanations for confusing environmental terms.
- Tools should deliver key messages to all employees.
- Pamphlets and brochures can be given out as information sources and promote the program at the same time.
- News releases announce the goal of efficiency and can be beneficial.

Implement Your Employee Awareness Program

- Choose a date to start the awareness program and use chosen vehicles to drive excitement and anticipation.
- Kick off the program and meet with staff with a special presentation or event, an article in the company newsletter and posters distributed around the office.
- Organize special "efficiency" activities, such as car pools, contests, or workshops, for employees to take part in.

Track your Company's Progress

- Set specific goals at the beginning of the program and measure your company's progress towards these goals.
- Provide employees with updated information and results. For example, each time energy consumption is significantly reduced, show this reduction, the reduced impact on the environment, and the dollars saved.

Evaluate Your Employee Awareness Program

- The information gained from this evaluation will demonstrate what is working and what is not.
- The two different means of evaluation are:
 - i. Qualitative evaluations - personal, 'face-to-face' interviews on the program with random employees.
 - ii. Quantitative evaluations - these deal with objectives, measurable facts, and numbers.

Follow Up

- After achieving the majority of primary goals set during the start of the program, you must continue the program to ensure waste reduction/resource conservation.
- Reinforce the message whenever possible.

Ideas to Motivate and Educate

- Stress the program in the employee orientation process.
- Explain why it is important to stop wasting resources.
- Offer incentives such as bonuses or awards for environmental excellence individually or, if your business is large enough, through individual departments. Consider ideas such as a selection of an Environmental Employee of the Month or providing small gift certificates to good performers.
- Proceeds from refundable materials could go to staff for a staff function or to be donated to a charity of the staff's choice or a staff sports team.
- Market your new environmental program to improve the image of the business through the consumers' eyes.
- Thank employees for their support and remind them that environmental programs are for the long term to improve their earth for their children and their children's children.

Sewer Watch

Keep all flammable, corrosive and toxic materials out of the sewers. Source control to regulate hazardous and toxic waste discharges is coming, in the form of legislative and enforcement tools. Nova Scotia businesses have an opportunity to comply through voluntary programs now.

Encouraging Top Management to Support Environmental Efforts

Sometimes the barrier for implementation is with top management. Without that support, it is difficult for any environmental efforts to be successful. Consider the following ideas if your manager or owner needs "greening":

- Get your foot in the door. Meeting with the right people is essential, but not always easy. Every business has an individual decision making process so ask several "decision makers" for ideas about the new environmental program.
- Set up a meeting and make a convincing presentation. Top management often has very little spare time. Make the presentation clear, concise, factual, and persuasive.
- Collect information on the problem.
- Explain what the competition is doing or will be doing soon.
- Highlight the potential cost savings.
- Be persistent and patient. Do not get discouraged about the new program. Everyone who starts up a successful program faces many challenges.
- Ask to set up a pilot project. Many managers will try something new for a limited period of time. This will introduce the idea to the company with "no strings attached".
- Encourage management to develop and adopt environmental policies. This act will build close ties between the program and management by getting them to participate in kick-off events, or endorsing the program by example.

Getting Everyone in the Act

Getting all people involved with your business in a new environmental program is challenging. Here are some tips to help get interest from suppliers, contractors, district managers, head office:

- Clearly inform everyone of your new environmental policy.
- Get suggestions and feedback from everyone. Associates can provide great feedback on what seems to be a problem and ways of improvement.
- Share your plans with others and learn from theirs. Becoming part of an organization involving different environmental policies can increase ways of improvement by following in others footsteps and also helping other businesses just beginning.

References and Resources

We have used and referred to publications, fact sheets and web sites from a number of sources to compile this facts sheet. We would like to acknowledge these organizations, agencies, and individuals.

- **Business Waste Prevention - Quick Tips**
<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/BizWaste/QuickTip.htm>
- **California Integrated Waste Management Board –**
<http://tmecc.org/>
- **Natural Resources Canada - "An Industry Guide to Implementing an Employee Awareness Program" –**
<http://www.nrcan.gc.ca>

Telephone and Website Guide

Eco-Efficiency Centre

Tel - 902-461-6704

Website - www.dal.ca/eco-burnside

Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA)

Tel - 902-426-6743

Website - www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/e/index.shtml

Atlantic Region, Environment Canada, P2

Tel - 902-426-7231

Website - www.atl.ec.gc.ca/epb/pollprev/

NS Dept of Environment and Labour

Tel - 902-424-5300

Website - www.gov.ns.ca/enla

NS Materials Exchange

Website - www.nsmaterials.com

RRFB Nova Scotia

Tel - 1-877-313-7732 (toll-free)

Website - www.rrfb.com

Directory of Solid Waste, Reuse,

Recycling and Composting

Contacts in Nova Scotia

<http://www.gov.ns.ca/enla/emc/wasteman/contents.htm>

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