

This guide is designed to help structure an environmental assessment that will assist you in evaluating environmental management performance. If you have not yet established environmental policies that fit your company's overall mission, use the BEA's How-To Guide #1: Developing an Environmental Policy Statement.

What is an Environmental Assessment?

The environmental assessment process will develop a snapshot of your company's environmental performance. The assessment is a procedure that ensures that the environmental implications of your company's practices are taken into account.

The process involves an analysis of the likely effects of your business activities on the environment. The two main purposes of an environmental assessment are to minimize or avoid adverse environmental effects and to incorporate environmental factors into the company's decision-making process. In addition, you will learn to quantify the economic value of improving your environmental performance.

How will an Environmental Assessment benefit my business?

An environmental assessment will provide you with information on your company's current environmental impacts and act as a guideline for your company to strive for higher environmental achievement. By considering your company's environmental practices through an environmental assessment, your company can attain the following benefits:

- ✓ Reduced overhead by improving efficiency
- ✓ Increased protection of human health
- ✓ Improved use of resources
- ✓ Minimized risk of environmental hazards
- ✓ Increased accountability
- ✓ Expanded opportunity for community outreach



Who should be involved in assessing our company's environmental impacts?

Your company should assemble an Assessment Team consisting of decision-makers and employees who are knowledgeable about all aspects of your business operations. A team could include:

Project Leader (upper-level management)

Data Collection Team (employees familiar with specific processes and business operations, including the resources used in each area as well as wastes produced)

Analysis Team (employees with working knowledge of business financial/accounting system and reporting methods)

How do I get started?



First, assemble an Environmental Assessment Team that is motivated and committed to evaluating the environmental performance of your business.

Next, create a realistic timeline for collecting environmental data, analyzing that data, and preparing an environmental assessment report.

How do I identify which environmental impacts to assess?

Your environmental assessment should include a description of each way your business impacts the environment, along with an analysis of what that environmental impact means to your business economically.

While the types of environmental impacts vary from business to business, some common types of impacts to look for when reviewing your business operations include:

Air: Air pollution can be a result of industrial processes and employee/company vehicles.

Water: Inefficient water use can strain limited water supplies; water pollution can be a result of industrial processes; and wetlands can be disrupted by building locations.

Waste: The types of waste produced by your business, the quantity of waste, and the method of disposal can all be considered environmental impacts.

Energy: The energy used in all aspects of your business, from office spaces to production, impacts the environment.

Land Use: Building locations and the availability of open space and wildlife habitats can be considered in your assessment.

How do I collect relevant environmental data?

The easiest way to collect data for your environmental assessment is to prepare checklists or worksheets for members of your assessment team to use in evaluating different areas of your business (either operational or physical areas, depending on the composition of your team and your type of business). The main data you gather should describe the nature and extent of each impact you have identified (i.e. quantity of resources used, quantity of wastes produced), and the costs associated with these impacts.



Tips For Collecting Environmental Data

Start with compliance. If any environmental impacts are governed by state or federal regulations, identify them and determine whether your business meets all requirements. Information from permit applications, permits, and inspection reports might be useful for your assessment.

Use your bills. Your utility bills provide a great deal of information about how you use valuable environmental resources like water and energy. Especially if your finance and facility staff do not regularly discuss your overhead expenses, it can be useful to make the connection between environmental resources and costs during your assessment.



Walk through the facility. Looking at all areas and equipment in your facility will help you identify process and pieces of equipment that impact the environment. Also, many pieces of equipment, located in offices or industrial sites, will have useful product information visible or nearby (i.e. amount of energy used by a space heater, amount of water used by an ice machine).

How do I analyze and report the environmental data collected?

The final report prepared by your Environmental Assessment Team should use the data collected to create a picture of your company's environmental performance. A useful report would include the following elements:

- List of all types of environmental impact
- List of all equipment, tasks, or processes that create impacts
- Quantity and description of environmental resources used; quantity and description of wastes produced; description of waste disposal methods
- Economic costs associated with each environmental impact
- Recommendations for mitigating environmental impacts

Environmental Assessment Checklist

- Our company has an Environmental Policy Statement.
- We have designated an Environmental Assessment Team to review our current environmental impacts and practices.
- The Environmental Assessment Team has created a timeline for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on the environmental aspects of all of our business operations.
- The Environmental Assessment Team is empowered to collect as much data as necessary, to report that data, and to make recommendations to key decision-makers.