

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Environment Policy Action Plan: annual progress report 2009–10

Equality and Human Rights Commission Environment Policy Action Plan – annual progress report 2009–10

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (the Commission) adopted an Environmental Policy in 2009 as part of our commitment to developing ourselves as an exemplary organisation. The policy set out four key objectives:

1. To put sustainable development at the heart of Commission decision-making.
2. To reduce the levels of direct and indirect pollution (including emission of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide) associated with Commission activities.
3. To raise awareness of environmental issues among Commission staff and to encourage them to play a full part in developing new ideas and initiatives to meet the other objectives.
4. To identify and work towards appropriate good practice standards and accreditation for the Commission's approach to environmental sustainability.

It is the responsibility of the whole organisation to work towards these objectives, but we are supported in this by the Green Group – a group of interested volunteers from across all our sites and Directorates. Advised by the Green Group and with external support from Groundwork, the Commission set itself some targets and actions for 2009–10 in support of the agreed objectives.

We said we would publish a report every year on our progress in implementing our agreed actions. Staff members across the Commission have taken action to make a difference to our environmental performance and we are pleased to be able to report progress in several areas.

Conserving and recycling resources

- New printing and copying arrangements have been introduced, which are expected to lead to a reduction in paper consumption. We have also produced 'Green' good practice guides on printing and copying, which are on display near all printers.
- A framework agreement for all externally sourced printing has been put in place. This includes a requirement to procure paper from renewable sources and use environmentally friendly inks.
- Recycling arrangements are in place in all offices, and we are talking to our landlords with the aim of increasing the scope of recycling in locations where it is limited.

Reducing energy consumption

- Volunteers from the Green Group ensured that 'switch it off' stickers were placed on all computer monitors and initiated a campaign to remind people to switch off. 'Pixie cards', which are left on the desks of those who forget, are now a feature of Commission life, and the impact has been to reduce the number of monitors left switched on overnight by about 75 per cent, saving 12 tonnes of CO₂ emissions in a year.
- Initiatives in particular offices have led to the switching off of air conditioning fan coil units in the Cardiff office and cleaning and facilities staff switching off office lights in the Manchester office.
- The ICT team identified scope to shut down a number of devices at the recovery site in Warrington, with predicted annual savings of 55 tonnes of CO₂.
- A commitment to high standards of energy efficiency has been built in to plans for office refurbishment in Manchester.

Reducing emissions of greenhouse gases (focusing on travel)

- The Green Group ran a cycling survey which attracted widespread interest across the Commission. This has been followed up with various promotional activities in London and Manchester, together with a commitment to put in place a 'cycle to work' scheme that will enable staff to buy bikes and cycling equipment tax-free through payroll deduction.
- Environmental considerations are also being taken into account in the new Commission Travel Policy that is currently under development.

Using our purchasing power to support these objectives

- The Commission uses a Pre Qualification Questionnaire that includes questions on environmental performance on the part of prospective suppliers. We hope to develop our good practice in this area further in the coming year.

Raising awareness

- The Green Group organised a very successful Green Action Day, with a range of activities taking place simultaneously on five sites, linked by video conferencing. Colleagues gave away low-energy light bulbs, promoted and sold Fair Trade goods, handed out cycling promotional material (including advice on safe routes), provided refreshments sourced from local suppliers using organic produce, and showed awareness-raising videos. The event was very well attended and we intend to repeat it in 2010.
- We have also used our staff intranet to promote 'green' messages and good practice.