

Chapter 2

Getting Started

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There are many ways to develop an environmental report. Controlling Officers, as top executives of government bureaux or departments, have the flexibility to choose ways that best serve the needs of their organizations. Below are some basic considerations that Controlling Officers could attend to before writing their reports:

1. Decide on your Organization's Objectives of Reporting

A well-defined set of objectives is the essential key to produce a quality environmental report with clear focus. The following are good examples taken from a pool of well-written environmental reports with appropriate adaptations:

- to demonstrate how far the bureau or department has and will incorporate environmental considerations when formulating and executing its policies, programmes and operations;
- to demonstrate the Controlling Officer's level of awareness on the environmental aspects arising from his or her organization's policies, programmes and operations;
- to illustrate how environment issues are being managed and addressed;
- to describe how the bureau or department intends to improve its environmental performance in future;
- to raise internal staff's awareness and develop a sense of responsible care for the environment;
- to establish the bureau or department's position or reputation on environmental issues; and
- to provide documentary evidence on the environmental performance of the bureau or department.

2. Appoint Responsible Persons

The Controlling Officer might need to appoint a person to coordinate the collection and consolidation of data or information in producing the report. Depending on the size and complexity of the bureau or department, this person might need a small team of key staff from major work areas within the organization who would contribute their own share of information input.

3. Identify your Target Audiences, their Needs and Expectations

There are many potential readers, such as:

- the Chief Executive, the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Financial Secretary;
- your Policy Secretaries;
- the general public;
- other local government bureaux and departments;
- your overseas counterparts;

- your Advisory Boards and Committees;
- members of the Advisory Council on the Environment;
- members of the Legislative Council;
- your staff;
- your subvented organizations;
- your suppliers, contractors and consultants;
- government-owned corporations;
- opinion-formers, including print and electronic media, academics and environmental groups; and
- private companies and organizations operating within your field of responsibility.

Having identified the target audiences, the Controlling Officer might wish to consider the expectations of their readers in deciding what to report, and possibly in setting objectives and targets. The Controlling Officer can obtain their views through any available formal and informal channels.

4. Decide on Report Format

Controlling Officers can choose to publish the report as either:

- a chapter or a section of the annual report; or
- a “stand-alone” environmental report.

They can employ multi-media techniques such as websites in addition to printing hard copies of the report.

5. Decide on Report Style

The style of the environmental report largely depends on who are the identified key target audiences. A journalistic style will appeal more to the general public whereas a business-like technical report will suit a more informed audience. As a general rule, the report should be:

- concise, factual and focused;
- readily understandable to the intended reader; and
- properly balanced in its use of text, illustrations, and presentation of data through charts and tables.

6. Decide on the Timing of Publication

Controlling Officers are required to publish their reports during the calendar year that follows the calendar year being reported on. If a Controlling Officer intends to publish his environmental report as a chapter or a section of his or her annual report, the production schedule for the environmental report would need to be well synchronized with that of the annual report.

Some Policy Secretaries might like to have the environmental reports of all the departments under the same policy bureau be published concurrently with the obvious benefit from the public relations point of view.