

Chapter 2

Getting Started

There are many ways to develop an environmental performance report. An organization has the flexibility to choose the best ways to serve its own needs. Below are some basic considerations that the top management of an organization could attend to before writing the report :

1. Decide on your Organization's Objectives of Reporting

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

- to demonstrate how far the organization has and will incorporate environmental considerations when formulating and executing its policies and operations;
- to demonstrate the top management's level of awareness on the environmental aspects arising from the organization's policies, operations, services and products;
- to illustrate how environmental issues are being managed and addressed;
- to describe how the organization 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 organization's position or reputation on environmental issues; and
- to provide documentary evidence on the environmental performance of the organization.

2. Appoint Responsible Persons

The organization 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 organization, 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 :

- share-holders;
- potential investors;
- customers;
- lenders and insurers;
- overseas partners and joint ventures;

- regulatory authorities;
- consumer interest groups;
- general public;
- employees;
- trade associations;
- suppliers and contractors;
- opinion-formers, including print and electronic media, academics and environmental groups; and
- other organizations in the same business.

Having identified the target audiences, the organization may need to consider the expectations of the report readers in deciding what to report, and possibly in setting objectives and targets. The management of the organization can obtain views through any available formal and informal channels.

4. Decide on Report Format

The organization can choose to publish the report as either :

- a chapter or a section of the organization's annual report; or
- a "stand-alone" environmental performance report.

Multi-media techniques such as websites can be employed in addition to printing hard copies of the report.

5. Decide on Report Style

The style of the environmental performance 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

Organizations are recommended to produce environmental performance reports annually. The reports can be published during the calendar year that follows the calendar year being reported on. If an environmental performance report is to be published as a chapter or a section of the organization's annual report, their production schedules would need to be well synchronized.