



Does your company have a strategy for waste minimisation and management?

Rationale for question

Disposing of materials to a landfill is inefficient. It is a careless use of finite resources, damaging to the environment and extremely expensive. Companies do not generally realise the full or true cost of their waste and often only recognise the expense of disposal. Even disposal costs are estimated at an average of 4 to 5% of business turnover in the UK and this is set to rise as available holes in the ground are filled up. The true cost of waste can often be 5-20 times greater.

Waste is much more than the materials that appear in a skip or in the piles of plastic bags after the office has been cleaned. It includes, for example, the energy wasted when lights are on when a building is empty, or when a vehicle is left with its engine running whilst the driver makes a delivery. Every business, regardless of size, turnover or sector can take steps to minimise waste because many of the savings require little more than a change of practice or business culture.

A waste minimisation and management strategy goes beyond a bare minimum of recycling office paper. It probably requires an operations-wide review to:

- identify all activities that produce waste;
- identify ways to stop producing waste (Prevention);
- eliminate unnecessary waste production (Reduction);
- determine how to reuse waste (Re-use); and
- develop ways to track progress in achieving targets for waste minimisation and management.

Efforts to reduce and manage waste may then include:

- employing recycling, composting, and energy recovery methods (Recovery);
- purchasing recycled products wherever possible; and
- using environmentally-friendly methods of disposal (Disposal).

This pattern 'Reduce, Re-use, Recycle' is sometimes called the 'three Rs' or 'the waste hierarchy' which incorporates prevention and disposal. It is a useful model as it clearly prioritises how to deal with waste. The best, cheapest and most environmentally sound option is to prevent or reduce waste before it is generated. Waste disposal should be the last resort.

Defining terms

A 'strategy' is a long term plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal taking into consideration the widest possible set of potential options and their impacts. Reacting to a short-term problem without changing your overall goals is usually tactical, not strategic.

'Waste minimisation' is the prevention or reduction of the use of materials, water or energy consumption at source.

'Waste management' is the collection, transport, processing and recycling of waste materials.

Primary and Secondary answer requirements

ANSWERING YES

Companies must:

1. describe a waste minimisation and management strategy that is appropriate to their business.

Companies may:

1. state whether they were founded with a mission to promote waste minimisation and management, e.g. collection of recyclable materials, reprocessing, or production of recycled products; and
2. share any successes or valuable lessons learned.

ANSWERING NO

Companies must:

1. explain why they do not or cannot answer YES to this question, listing the business reasons, any mitigating circumstances or other reasons that apply.

Companies may:

1. describe any waste minimisation and management efforts they make even if they cannot be referenced as part of a broad strategy; and
2. mention any future intentions regarding this issue.

DON'T KNOW is not a permissible answer to this question.

NOT APPLICABLE is not a permissible answer to this question.

NO ANSWER YET is only permissible under extraordinary circumstances and then for only a limited period.