

Environment

GPMU members are often ideally placed to bring about positive changes to a company's environmental performance. Whether it is through pointing out areas where waste may be minimised, or by showing that there are areas where damaging chemicals are being used in harmful ways, GPMU members can contribute to improving both the environmental performance of a company and its continued economic success

Involving the Workforce

The GPMU believes that companies should place employee involvement at the heart of their environmental policies, valuing the positive contribution that GPMU members can make.

GPMU members are already trying to have a positive influence on environmental issues within many companies either through placing environmental issues on workplace health & safety committees, or through safety reps pressing for improvements.

One example of the role GPMU members have developed in improving environmental standards is provided by a company where the GPMU reps have been involved in the development of the company's Environment Management Plan.

GPMU Policy

1. Protecting the environment is a workplace issue and companies should seek to reduce health risks to employees and the public caused by environmentally damaging practices.
2. A series of employee rights should be established encompassing environmental training, consultation, information, and inspection rights. In the vast majority of cases these rights will represent an extension of the current role of health & safety representatives.
3. Employees should be at the heart of a company's environmental policy, where their knowledge and experience can be used to improve the environmental performance of the company.

Background

The destruction and the pollution of the environment are issues that affect all GPMU members and their families. Global warming and increasing air pollution are just two of the major global environmental changes that will impact upon our members causing increasing health risks and massive social upheaval. We are already seeing the destructive effects of changing weather patterns throughout the world leading to both droughts and flooding.

As a trade union it is logical that the expression of our members concern will be rooted in the workplace, the place where we are involved and where we seek to positively influence events. It is also logical that our approach to environmental issues will draw heavily on our involvement in health and safety in the workplace.

Beyond direct health and safety issues our members are also in the position of being able to provide practical ideas on waste reduction and energy saving practices at the work-place level. These ideas not only improve the environment but also bring benefits to their companies by reducing costs and saving money in an increasingly competitive economy.

By playing a part in the crucial role of environmental issues in the workplace, our members can not only improve their own immediate health and working conditions but can also play a part in improving the global environment of their family and friends.

Health & Safety and the Environment

It is often the case that within the workplace environmental and health & safety issues are one and the same. For example, in the instance of airborne pollution, – such as the fumes from volatile solvents – what goes up the chimney also goes through the bodies of the workers.

The GPMU is involved with the government's Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) which is examining the environmental role of trade unions in the workplace. The GPMU believes that there is a need for the development of a number of rights – such as the provision of information, consultation, inspection, training and time off rights – that allow employees to deal with environmental issues.

Safety reps are already well placed to deal with environmental issues during their inspections of a workplace, noting areas of concern such as in the case of volatile solvents. An extension of safety representative's rights to cover environmental concerns will be one of the easiest ways to improve the environmental impact of a company.

'Sustainable Development'

Sustainable development means that we meet our own present needs in a way which will not damage the ability of our children or grandchildren to meet their needs when their time arrives. This process covers many areas, including employment and the economy, but it is on environmental issues that sustainable development is widely linked. Protecting the environment now is perhaps the best way to ensure that future generations can meet their own needs.

Case Study 1

The installation of covers on high-solvent colour trays in one print firm cut the solvent vapour levels by almost a half. This reduction in vapour levels saved the company a considerable amount of money but more importantly it also significantly reduced the fumes that GPMU members inhaled.

Case Study 2

GPMU members knowledge of the waste produced within their companies can also lead to improved environmental performance. One company consulted with employees about the best locations for paper and cardboard recycling bins. The increased use of these bins reduced disposal costs for the company and benefited the environment.

Case Study 3

Some companies are willing to pay a substantial amount to improve the environment. In fact one company, where the GPMU is actively involved on environmental issues, is spending £3 million pounds on thermal oxidisers – incinerators – to curb solvent releases into the atmosphere. But this is just one aspect of an environmental management plan which includes addressing issues from solvent emissions to waste control, energy consumption, and ensuring that paper is sourced from well-managed forests.

Environmental Legislation

There are a number of legal obligations placed on company owners to ensure that their companies do not pollute the environment or the bodies of their employees.

At present, GPMU members have very few legal rights as regards reducing the environmental impact of the companies that they work for. The most effective legislation that can currently be used to deal with environmental matters is health and safety laws that place limitations on the level of harmful emissions that employees are subjected to.

However, there is further legislation that some companies have to comply with on environmental issues, including the packaging regulations, water regulations, and *Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999*.

Although this legislation does not give employees any legal rights as regards environmental matters, chapels should aim to negotiate with companies on the best way to achieve their obligations (as set out below), and obtain training and information to ensure that all employees know how then can contribute to improved environmental practices.

Chapels contain many members who have the knowledge and the experience to ensure that companies not only fulfil their legal obligations but also improve upon the set-down standards.

COSHH

One of the prime concerns for the GPMU is the way in which the health and safety of GPMU members can be put at risk by the environment that they work in. Much of the early work on reducing emissions into the air centred on the risk to health and safety rather than the environment, that is emissions into the factory atmosphere rather than to outside air.

An example of this is the COSHH Regulations. These regulations can be used to reduce the level of harmful emissions to levels that are not considered dangerous for employees to experience, which in turn will reduce the harmful emissions released into the wider environment. Further information on COSHH and COSHH assessments can be obtained from the section on COSHH elsewhere in this handbook.

Pollution Prevention and Control Act 1999

At the end of 1999 the *Pollution Prevention and Control Bill 1999* will replace the current *Environmental Protection Act 1990 Part 1: Local Air Pollution Control (LAPC)*. For companies that use between 5 tonnes (25 tonnes in the case of cold set web offset printing or sheet fed offset litho printing processes) and 200 tonnes (or 150kg per hour) of organic solvents per annum the new regulations will not greatly change the companies legal requirements.

Organic solvents may be contained in a number of products including (but not limited) to the following:

- Acetone
- Adhesives
- Blanket and roller wash chemicals
- Cleaning fluids
- Developer
- Fountain solution
- Ink
- Isopropyl alcohol
- Screen cleaning fluids

The most effective way for companies to comply with both the LAPC and the new regulations will be if they manage and minimise the use of organic solvents, for example by switching to different substances. However, if this is not viable companies are presently expected to use Government guidance documents (on Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Costs) to establish processes that are less environmentally damaging. The guidance documents relevant to GPMU sectors are:

- Manufacture of printing ink (PG 6/11)
- Printing and coating of metal packaging (PG 6/7)
- Paper coating (PG 6/18)
- Printworks (PG 6/16)
- Printing of flexible packaging (PG 6/17).

If the company you work for uses more than 200 tonnes of organic solvent per year (or 150kg per hour) then the new legislation will have quite a dramatic effect on what is expected from the company. These companies will be expected to reduce their environmental impact by using the new Best Available Techniques to ensure that air and water pollution is reduced, and that the company works to minimise waste, use energy efficiently, and prevent environmental accidents.

Water Laws

The Water Industry Act 1991 and the Water Resources Act 1991 Guidelines aim to ensure that companies do not allow any pollutant to enter the country's water system unless the company has received consent from its local water supply company (for discharges into sewers) or the Environment Agency for discharges into rivers etc. The following two sections contain a number of guidelines that if followed will help companies to comply with the Acts.

Water Industry Act 1991

- No company should discharge into a foul sewer any trade effluent without having obtained first a consent to do so from the local water supply company. (Trade effluent is any liquid waste in any quantity that results from an organisation's operations and so it can include waste photochemicals, condensate water from compressed air installations, cooling water, liquid process wastes and wash water. It also includes liquid wastes or wash waters, other than human and domestic wastes, that some might be tempted to discharge via sinks, basins or toilets.)
- If the company you work for already discharges any quantity of trade effluent to foul sewer, no matter how small, and does not have written consent or permission to do so, the discharge should be stopped immediately and the water supply company contacted to discuss the best means of tackling the problem.
- Surround, with an impervious upstand, foul sewer entry points that might otherwise be vulnerable to receiving pollutants without the consent of the water company.
- Commercial spill kits or absorbent granules/sawdust should be provided in the locations where spills or leaks of pollutants could occur and find their way into a sewer if not contained.
- Substances such as oils, solvents, chemicals, adhesives, inks or powders should not be washed into foul sewers without the consent of the water company.
- Never use a sink, basin, WC or gully for disposing of any liquid wastes or discharging of wash waters unless permission to do so has been obtained from the water supply company.
- All relevant employees should be aware of the procedures that have been developed to handle disposal or discharge of liquid wastes.

Water Resources Act 1991

- No company should discharge into controlled waters (i.e. a river, estuary, lake, pond, stream, canal, groundwater or the like) of any 'poisonous, noxious or polluting matter or any solid waste matter' from any activity your company undertakes without having obtained first a consent to do so from the Environment Agency. Such matters might include waste photochemicals, condensate water from compressed air installations, cooling water, wash water and contaminated run-off from car parks or maintenance bays. Note, in addition to a direct route, a discharge to controlled waters might occur via surface water drains or by discharge onto the land.
- Develop and rehearse procedures to handle the possibility that fluids might be spilt during delivery, movement around the premises and during use.
- All deliveries of fluids should be supervised by a responsible person who is aware of the necessary procedures if a spill occurs and can check that no containers are leaking at the time of delivery and storage.
- Portable or fixed pipes and pumps for transportation and transfer of liquids around the premises should be installed. The purpose of this would be to minimise the possibility of consequential waste and pollution caused by spills.
- All sinks should be connected to the foul sewerage system so that any washing activities do not result in a discharge to controlled waters.
- Surface water drain entry points that might otherwise be vulnerable to receiving pollutants (including contaminated surface water) without the consent of the Environment Agency should be surrounded with an impervious upstand.
- There should be designated areas for storage of drums and other containers holding potential pollutants. These areas should also be provided with impervious bunds or other forms of containment.
- Drip trays or other forms of containment should be installed beneath any equipment that is likely to leak or result in spillage of pollutants e.g. oils, solvents containing fluids or photochemicals.
- Commercial spill kits or absorbent granules/sawdust should be provided in the locations where spills or leaks of pollutants could occur and find their way into surface water drains if not contained.
- Ensure that spills of solids or liquids are cleaned up to prevent unauthorised discharges into controlled waters and prevent groundwater pollution.
- Do not wash substances such as oils, solvents, chemicals, adhesives, inks or powders into surface water drains or allow them to seep into the ground.
- All relevant employees should be aware of the procedures developed to prevent spills or leaks of substances from causing pollution of controlled waters or groundwater.

Packaging Regulations

The UK has implemented a number of elements of the EC's Directive on packaging and packaging waste which sets recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste. The definition of packaging includes materials used for containment, protection, handling, delivery and presentation of goods. The two bits of UK legislation that may apply in the case of packaging are:

- Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997
- The Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 1998.

Recovery Targets

There has been extensive consultation with industry about the UK regulations, resulting in an approach known as 'shared producer responsibility'. This means that every business which handles packaging, from manufacturing raw materials which become packaging to selling any products in packaging, has a defined share of the UK recovery and recycling targets.

The overall recovery target for obligated UK companies began at 38% in 1998 rising to revised levels of 43% in 1999 and 45% in 2000. There are specific recycling targets for each material. In addition there will be an obligation for recovery only of wood and other packaging materials from 2000.

Who do the Packaging Regulations apply to?

In 1999 if a company handled more than 50 tonnes of packaging (excluding exports) in the previous year and had a turnover of more than £5 million in the last financial year for which audited accounts are available then the company is obligated under the UK packaging regulations.

From 2000 and in subsequent years, businesses which handled more than 50 tonnes of packaging (excluding exports) in the previous year and had a turnover of over £2 million in the last financial year for which audited accounts are available will also be obligated and must then prove material recovery and recycling.

Advice to Chapels

Where the environment impact of your company is an issue, or a potential issue, Chapels should be involved in relevant discussions with the employer. The main aim of chapel involvement will be to take a positive approach to improving both the external and internal environment.

To achieve this Chapels should

- appoint a workplace environmental representative. In most cases this is likely to be an existing safety representative.
- ask the employer to consult with them, and provide information, on environmental matters.
- seek agreement from employers that the provisions of the safety reps regs are extended to cover the environment
- if there is an existing health and safety committee, add the environment to its remit.
- target issues where workplace health and safety improvements and environmental improvements go hand in hand.

Further Information

Environment Agency
0645 333 111

Environmental Technology Best Practice Programme
0800 585795

Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
01786 457 700

Department of the Environment and the Regions
0800 585 794

Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme
0800 585794