Environmentally sustainable work practices

[Stage 6 VET Business services syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/vet/business-services-syllabus) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2020

The [Business Services Syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/e5ea12b9-2d53-415c-bdc4-4b0da5ee6a7c/vet-business-services-11-12-syllabus-based-on-BSBv5.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=), [mind map](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/wcm/connect/9f3af518-8a1a-46b2-816f-25a7b0b447a8/mind-map-vet-business-services-stage-6-sustainability.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=), [past HSC exam papers](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/resources/hsc-exam-papers) and other important exam preparation documents can be found at [NESA](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/vet/business-services-syllabus).

# Key terms and concepts

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| Term | Definition |
| Best practice | Methods and techniques that have consistently shown superior results which are used as benchmarks |
| Environmental issues | Negative effects on the sustainability of a quality environment |
| Environmental hazards/risks | Actual or potential threats to the environment as a result of an organisation's activities. |
| Environmentally sustainable work practices | Practices which reduce harm to the environment and reduce wastage of resources. |
| Organisational plans | Business documents developed to identify where the business wants to go and what it needs to do in order to achieve these goals. |
| Resource consumption | The rate at which natural resources are being depleted. |
| Resource efficiency | Using resources efficiently so they can be reused or recycled to limit the depletion of the stock of natural resources, as well as to limit the harm to the environment. |
| Sustainability | The result of using resources to meet the needs of the present generation without jeopardising or depleting the resources for future generations. |

## Important notes

### Identifying current resource use

#### Understanding sustainability

Interaction between humans and natural systems can impact significantly on society and the environment, which in turn, affects our way of life and our future. Sustainability is about being able to continue an activity for a prolonged period of time while minimising the risk to the environment. To be sustainable, we must develop new approaches to our lifestyle, including the way we do business, so that future generations can enjoy the natural environment as much as we do today.

Current environmental issues applicable to the business services industry include:

* sustainability - using resources in a way that reduces the impact on the environment, such as using less paper or electricity and reducing waste by recycling.
* waste management - collecting, recycling or disposing of waste materials like paper, toner cartridges and other resources used in offices.
* energy use and efficiency - efficiency is about using less resources to produce the same outcome. Energy efficiency is being able to reduce electricity use in order to reduce costs as well as the impact on the environment.
* water resources management - the introduction of systems to ensure that water is not wasted, like using dual flush toilets and water saving taps.
* recycling/reuse - recycling turns used materials into new products to save resources, energy and land fill, while reusing will lengthen the life of an item before it has to be discarded, for example, using the non-used side of paper to make notes on.
* clean-up practices - to ensure that water is not wasted and that environmentally friendly products are used in clean-up practices to reduce the impact on the environment.

#### Environmentally sustainable work practices

Environmentally sustainable work practices are those which reduce harm to the environment and reduce wastage of resources. Business services workers can help protect the environment by following the three Rs:

**Reduce**

* print on both sides of paper
* use electronic files rather than paper files
* reduce the amount of junk mail that your office receives
* reduce waste by choosing products that have minimal packaging and can be used productively and then recycled

**Re-use**

* re-use containers, packaging or waste products, wherever possible
* reuse paper for printing draft copies
* make scribble pads from paper used on one side
* use recycled toner cartridges
* use rechargeable batteries instead of single-use batteries

**Recycle**

* recycle waste material wherever possible

Businesses should also use the following strategies to minimise energy wastage:

* + maintain air-conditioning at 20°-24°C in winter and in summer between 23°-26°C.
  + control direct sunlight with blinds and window treatments to minimise heat build-up
  + maintain only security lighting after business hours
  + use power saving options for computers and monitors
  + switch off equipment overnight wherever possible
  + replace incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs
  + ensure that air conditioner filters are cleaned regularly
  + install solar electricity

##### Resource use

A resource is any input used in an activity in order to help earn a living.

Resources used in a business include:

* human resources – workers
* energy - electricity
* infrastructure – basic facilities, structures and services that act as a foundation for a business. Examples include: buildings, equipment, tools required to manufacture their products, computing platforms, IT services such as support and backup, transportation services.
* technology and associated consumables – hardware, video conferencing, virtual office
* equipment and materials – machinery, computers, paper, stock that has been purchased for further processing

It is important to measure resource use in order to measure improvement. Techniques used to collect and measure resource consumption include:

* observing how a resource is being used - making visual assessment of patterns of usage, such as counting how many air conditioners have not been turned off at the end of the work day
* examining invoices from suppliers - comparing invoices for different time periods to calculate changes in usage
* measuring resource usage under different conditions

##### Complying with environmental regulations

Legal compliance means behaving according to the law.  
  
An Act is law or legislation that is passed by governments which is enforceable by courts.

A business must comply with all environmental laws covering water, land, air, noise pollution and waste management, as outlined in the main piece of environmental legislation, the [Protection of the Environment Operations Act (NSW)](https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1997/156/full). This Act is managed by the [NSW Environment Protection Authority](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/licensing-and-regulation/legislation-and-compliance/about-the-poeo-act).

Information on Commonwealth environment laws can be found at the [Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment](https://www.awe.gov.au/).

Codes of practice are written guidelines issued by an official body setting out recommended or preferred processes, actions or organisational structures to be applied in a given setting. Codes of practice can be found at [Safework NSW](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/list-of-all-codes-of-practice).

Most businesses develop and implement policies and procedures to minimise risk to the environment and workers, whilst ensuring compliance with the laws. Methods used to assess compliance include: completing a checklist to see if steps are being followed, measuring resource usage over time, conducting an audit, and monitoring staff attendance at training.

Businesses that fail to comply with environmental laws run the risk of penalties under the [Protection of the Environment Operations Act (NSW)](https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/act/1997/156/full). Penalties range from on-the-spot-fines to $5million fines and 7 years gaol. Reports on company penalties can be found on the [EPA news](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news) webpage.

A breach is an instance of breaking a law or regulation or failing to fulfil a duty or obligation. All workers are responsible for identifying breaches and potential breaches (near misses) of environmental regulations and procedures. All workers must report breaches to the appropriate personnel, such as a supervisor, manager, [health and safety representative](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/safety-starts-here/consultation@work/health-and-safety-representatives), or business owner. The method of reporting could be verbally, via a [hazard/incident report form](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/403959/hazard-incident-report-form-SW08483.pdf) or during a team meeting. If the incident presents an immediate threat to human health or property, such as a large chemical spill, emergency services should be phoned on 000. As first responders, Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police and NSW Ambulance Services take responsibility for controlling the incident.

##### Improving resource efficiency

A business may put into place plans to improve environmental practices and resource efficiency.

These initiatives may include:

* green office program - using energy efficient office equipment which will reduce operating and environmental costs, including greenhouse gas emissions and using "green" power.
* supply chain program - improving the sourcing of raw materials or equipment to deliver a better quality environmentally-friendly product for customers, buying in bulk to reduce the amount of packaging, buying products made from renewable resources, supporting suppliers that do not hurt the environment.
* efficient use of energy and resources - use power-save options on equipment, turn off equipment when not being used or at the end of the working day rather than leaving on stand-by, install energy efficient light bulbs and turn off lights when not using a room, install sensor lights in areas not used often, run dishwasher when full and using eco setting, reduce fuel usage by using video conferencing instead of driving to meetings.
* use of alternative forms of energy. For example, solar power.
* use of renewable, recyclable, reusable and recoverable resources:
  + renewable – naturally restores or replenishes itself, constantly available without human or other outside influences. For example, solar and wind power.
  + recyclable - capable of being used again but must be processed before reuse. For example, aluminium cans, glass bottles, paper.
  + reusable - items that can be used more than once, either for the same purpose or a different purpose. For example, use ceramic coffee cups instead of paper cups, magnetic disk.
  + recoverable - energy from waste
* avoidance or minimisation strategies:
  + purchasing sustainable products - products made from recycled material or which are made from renewable resources
  + regular maintenance of tools and equipment - to keep in good working order
  + use of biodegradable/non-toxic materials - materials that can decompose naturally or will not cause any damage to the environment
* waste minimisation:
  + accurate measurements and calculations - purchase only what the business needs and will use
  + recycling - collecting and sorting waste in order that useful materials can be manufactured into new products and not added to landfill
  + using recyclable products - purchasing products that can be recycled after use rather than added to landfill
* removal and disposal of non-reusable materials in a responsible manner:
  + consumables - dispose of in a responsible manner according to manufacturer's guidelines
  + chemicals and hazardous substances - check the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for correct disposal of these products.

Local councils, such as [City of Parramatta Council](https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/recreation-environment/sustainable-business), and [State government](https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/recreation-environment/sustainable-business/state-government-programs) run a range of innovative programs to help businesses implement environmentally sustainable work practices and achieve greater resource efficiency.

#### Case studies

* 1. **Visy Recycling** is one of Australia’s largest and innovative waste recovery companies. [Watch the video](https://www.visy.com.au/about/visy) for an overview of the company.

1. How much of the following packaging does Visy recycle in a year?
   * Paper and cardboard
   * glass
   * plastics
   * metals
2. Refer to Visy's school [recycling poster](https://www.visy.com.au/recycling/education). List items that a school could recycle.

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1. How can Visy help businesses participate in environmentally sustainable work practices?

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1. The EPA uses a range of tools to ensure environmental compliance, including formal warnings, official cautions, notices and prosecutions. Why was Visy [fined in 2017](https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news/media-releases/2017/epamedia171208-visy-paper-fined-$1500-for-reporting-breaches-at-st-peters-waste-facility)?

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* 1. The University of Queensland offers some simple [sustainability tips](https://sustainability.uq.edu.au/sustainability-tips) for staff and students. Outline how individuals can help to protect the environment.

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Sustainability Victoria helps businesses to improve resource use.

* + 1. Outline Sustainability Victoria’s advice to [reduce energy use in a business](https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/Business/Energy-efficiency-for-business).

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* + 1. Read the [EGO Pharmaceuticals story](https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/About-us/Latest-news/2019/12/22/22/52/Simple-changes-create-big-savings-at-this-manufacturing-business). List the strategies this company implemented to save energy.

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* 1. Barangaroo is an urban renewal project on the western waterfront of Sydney’s CBD. It aims to be carbon neutral and water positive, working towards zero waste emissions.

Outline two sustainability strategies for each goal. For information, visit [The Barangaroo Project](https://www.barangaroo.com/the-project/progress/sustainability/).

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* 1. Go to the NSW Government’s [Sustainability Advantage Program](https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainabilityadvantage/).
     1. Explain the advantages to business in signing up for the Sustainability Advantage Program.

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* + 1. Click on "Sustainability case studies", choose one business and make notes on how that business improved their environmental and business performance.

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#### Activity

1. List ways a business services workplace can reduce paper wastage.

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1. Download the Code of Practice [Preparation of safety data sheets for hazardous chemicals](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/50084/Preparation-of-safety-data-sheets-for-hazardous-chemicals-COP.pdf). What information is on a Safety Data Sheet?

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1. What is the purpose of measuring resource consumption and how can this data be used to develop an environmentally sustainable workplace?

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1. How can resource consumption be measured in the business services workplace?

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1. What should a business do to implement a green office program?

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1. Identify environmentally sustainable strategies (not already mentioned above) that can be employed in a business services workplace.

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1. Outline consequences for a business that has not complied with environmental legislation.

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#### Role plays

Working in pairs, discuss, then act out, the following situations in order to show your understanding of this competency.

1. You are planning a training session about sustainability for the office staff. Discuss with the Office Manager the items that should be included on the agenda.
2. You are running an induction training session. Explain the techniques that the business encourages the staff to follow in order to minimise the rate of use of resources.
3. The managing director of a large publishing company is having a discussion with the architect on what to include in the plans for a new office/warehouse complex that would be considered a "green building".
4. You are supervising a new staff member. Explain the procedures to be followed when disposing of waste.