



**SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES
FOR OFFICE FURNITURE
MANUFACTURERS AND SUPPLIERS**

BIFMA International
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BIFMA SUSTAINABILITY GUIDELINES - 2005

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1 Foreword

Established in 1973, the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) International is a not-for-profit trade association of furniture manufacturers and suppliers addressing issues of common concern. The association serves as the industry voice for workplace solutions by providing standards development, statistical data generation, government relations, industry promotion, and education.

BIFMA is committed to promoting sustainable work environments and business practices based on sound economics, environmental protection, and social responsibility. We will accomplish these goals by fostering partnerships between manufacturers, suppliers, end users, and the science community; providing association members with education in the concepts of sustainable design; and developing meaningful tools for quantifying and communicating industry progress to interested parties.

The BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines have been developed to provide a roadmap for office furniture manufacturers and suppliers of all sizes beginning their journey to establish and/or expand their environmental management system (EMS), such as ISO14001, to include sustainable business practices. The BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines focus on five key elements in an EMS to create a foundation for developing a sustainability roadmap, they include:

1. The Environmental Policy
1. Environmental Aspects
1. Legal and Other Requirements
1. Objectives and Targets
1. Management Review

The intention of these guidelines is for the elements described herein to be used by companies in the office furniture industry so that best practices may be shared, an increase in the implementation of sustainable practices may occur, and sustainability awareness may be elevated with industry partners, stakeholders and the communities in which they operate. While not ISO14001 requirements, the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines are consistent with ISO 14001.

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1 Scope

The purpose of the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines is to provide guidance in applying the theories of sustainability and creating a framework for sharing best practices and progress achieved on the road to a sustainable future.

When developing an Environmental Management System (EMS), companies can use these guidelines to help integrate sustainable practices (defined as simultaneously addressing the “Triple Bottom Line” of the economy, the environment, and social equity), into their operations. The goal of this approach is to help increase profits, improve environmental performance, and address social equity issues important to key stakeholders including employees, customers, investors, and regulators. The three components of the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines are as follows:

1. A Sample Top Executive Commitment Form
1. Guiding Elements
1. A Sample Reporting Framework

1 Definitions

Biodiversity – The word is a contraction of “biological diversity,” and refers to the number, variety, and variability of living organisms.

Communicate Progress to Internal Stakeholders and as Applicable to External Parties – A requirement in the ISO 14001 Standard that an organization communicate its environmental policy to internal staff members and respond to communications from external stakeholders

Ecological Integrity – The healthy functioning of biological organisms within the ecosystem they inhabit.

Environmental Aspects – An element of an organization's activities, products or services that can interact with the environment. NOTE: There may be varying degrees of sophistication from company to company in their ability to identify and address environmental aspects.

Environmental Policy – Is a statement by the organization of its intentions and principles in relation to its overall environmental performance, which provides a framework for action and for the setting of its environmental objectives and targets.

Environmental Management System – The part of the overall management system that includes organizational structure, planning activities, responsibilities, practices, procedures, processes and resources for developing, implementing, achieving, reviewing and maintaining the environmental policy.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Emissions of gases related to human activities that accelerate the “greenhouse effect.” The term “greenhouse effect” describes the natural heat-trapping qualities of trace gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Human activities have significantly increased the concentrations of *natural* greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. While carbon dioxide is not the only greenhouse gas, it is the main contributor to warming. Other important greenhouse gases include nitrous oxide and methane, both of which have increased in the last century.

Life-cycle – Means the total impact of a system, function, product or service from the extraction of raw materials through its end-of-life management.

Renewable Energy – A renewable energy source is defined as any energy source that is replenishable and replenished on some reasonable time scale. Renewable energy sources include, but are not limited to wind, solar, heat from the earth's interior, oceans, rivers, and eligible biomass.

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Renewable Raw Materials – A renewable raw material is any material that is replenishable and replenished on some reasonable time scale. Renewable material sources include, but are not limited to wood, grass fibers, plant-based plastics, fuels and 100 percent recycled content metals, papers, plastics and glass.

Resource Effectiveness/Material Intensity – Refers to the concept of continuously improving the utility and durability of the product or service provided while reducing its total material and energy throughput such as the use of less energy, the generation of less waste, and the use of less mass per unit produced.

Significant Environmental Aspect – A significant aspect is an environmental aspect that has or can have significant environmental impact.

Social Equity – Involves the identification of issues, the development of standards and the implementation of programs that address corporate responsibility for the ethical treatment of employees, communities and other stakeholders.

Source Reduction – This refers to a pollution prevention technique that eliminates the potential for pollution at the source, or where the polluting material enters the product or service cycle.

Sustainable Practices – This refers to efforts by industry to achieve sustainable development goals that call for simultaneous performance improvements in economic vitality; ecological integrity; and social equity.

Sustainable Business Codes – Refers to any voluntary business code of conduct or code of practice that calls for simultaneous improvements in economic, environmental, and social performance.

Triple Bottom Line – Sustainable development involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic vitality; ecological integrity; and social equity. Companies aiming for sustainability need to perform not against a single, financial bottom line, but against the triple bottom line.

4 Components

The basis for these guidelines is rooted in three primary assumptions. First, it is believed that a top executive commitment is an essential part of a company pledging their commitment and resources to pursue sustainability principles in their business. Such a high profile expression of commitment could be publicly shared both within the company as well as externally to customers, end users, peers and suppliers to signify the diligence the company will employ in aligning its business with sustainable practices. Accountability to any commitment is essential to the credibility of these guidelines.

Second, it is essential to have a general format of topics and understanding so that across the office furniture industry, all companies are working from the same core definitions and key elements of sustainable business practices. These are addressed in five key areas: environmental policy, environmental aspects, legal and other requirements, objectives and targets, and management review. Taken collectively, these elements comprise the baseline for these guidelines.

Lastly, because different companies will employ their own unique formats addressing their performance against their commitments on the five key elements, a sample reporting framework is outlined that can be incorporated into any company's existing format.

4.1 Sample Top Executive Statement of Commitment

A Top Executive Statement of Commitment ensures that there is understanding and commitment to the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines at the highest level within the member organization. Furthermore, it signifies that senior management accepts their role in constantly moving their company toward sustainability and their willingness to report progress toward these goals. The following statement embodies the critical elements of a Top Executive Statement of Commitment. Companies may choose to add on to this text but should include the language as follows as a minimum requirement for compliance with the Sustainability Guidelines.

Sample statement:

(COMPANY NAME) is committed to promoting sustainable work environments and business practices based on sound economics, environmental protection, social responsibility and incorporating the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines into our practices. We will routinely update our practices, and we intend to make consistent, measurable progress toward these goals and will pursue them in all facets of our operations throughout the world.

We will strive to ensure that our key stakeholders are aware of our commitment as we pursue the goal of becoming an increasingly sustainable company. We also commit to reporting our progress in the area of Environmental Aspects; Legal and Other Requirements; Objectives and Targets; and Management Review as defined in the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines.

As the leader of our company, I am personally committed to these principles and will ensure that we make every effort to meet them.

Top Executive Signature

4.2 Guiding Elements

The following guiding elements should be addressed as a company prepares its plans for adopting and improving sustainable business practices.

4.2.1 - Environmental Policy: Environmental management systems contain an environmental policy statement. To incorporate the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines, a company's environmental policy should include the scope of the commitment to sustainability and address all three of its elements (i.e. environmental aspects, economic aspects, and social equity). A sample statement is included below:

Sample policy statement:

“XYZ Company understands that it has a responsibility for the environment as well as the social and economic systems that impact the environment. We define sustainability as simultaneously improving the vitality of the economy, the integrity of ecological systems and the advancement of social equity. We are committed to pursuing the goal of sustainability and will weigh the impacts of our business decisions against the costs to the ecological, social and economic systems they affect. We will regularly update our practices and we intend to make consistent, measurable progress toward these goals and will pursue them in all facets of our operations throughout the world.”

4.2.2 - Environmental Aspects: Environmental management systems contain a commitment to identify and address environmental aspects. Environmental aspects are elements of an organization's activities, products or services that can interact with the environment. There may be varying degrees of sophistication from company to company in their ability to identify and address environmental aspects.

Samples:

- Pollution prevention opportunities
- Energy conservation
- Water conservation
- Green House Gas (GHG) reductions
- Disposal of solid and/or hazardous waste
- Recycling of scrap
- Health and safety issues
- Community involvement

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4.2.3 - Legal and Other Requirements: Environmental management systems contain a commitment to identify and address legal and other requirements.

Samples:

- strive to exceed minimum environmental regulatory compliance requirements when addressing significant aspects
- conduct periodic self-assessments concerning performance relative to legal and other requirements
- subscribe to at least one national or internationally recognized sustainable business code or practice
- identify and employ best practices in the handling and disposal of waste materials
- promptly and responsibly correct conditions within our control that endanger health, safety or the environment
- encourage employees to report dangerous incidents or conditions to management or appropriate authorities
- inform customers of the environmental impacts of products
- regularly seek feedback through dialogue with persons or organizations in communities near our facilities

4.2.4 - Objectives and Targets: Establish measurements and performance criteria for significant economic, environmental, and social impacts relating to the following sample of issues

Samples:

- reduce and make continual progress toward eliminating the release of substances that may cause environmental damage to the air, water, or the earth or its inhabitants
- increase the use of renewable raw materials
- conserve energy and improve the energy efficiency of internal operations, goods and services
- increase the use renewable energy sources
- increase the resource effectiveness and decrease the material intensity of products
- strive to safeguard habitats and ecological systems affected by operations, and protect open spaces and wilderness while preserving biodiversity
- reduce and where possible eliminate waste through source reduction and recycling
- strive to use natural resources in a manner that will not deplete them

- strive to conserve non-renewable natural resources through efficient use and careful planning
- reduce the environmental, health and safety risks to our employees and the communities in which we operate
- reduce and where possible eliminate the use, manufacture or sale of products and services that may cause environmental damage or health or safety hazards

4.2.5 - Management Review: The management team assesses the effectiveness of the environmental management system on a routine basis to assure that resources are available to achieve the company's environmental policy.

Samples:

- communicate progress toward sustainability to internal stakeholders and, as applicable, to external parties
- ensure that the environmental management system is pertinent to current operations
- ensure that the Board of Directors and Top Executive are fully informed about pertinent information related to the company's performance against Triple Bottom Line objectives
- conduct an annual self-evaluation of our progress toward Triple Bottom Line objectives
- continually improve Triple Bottom Line reporting and environmental audit procedures
- adhere to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) "Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims" (see Resources section of this document)
- identify and implement best practices as they emerge

4.3 Sample Reporting Framework

Companies utilizing the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines may use a self-assessment system to report on progress toward sustainability. Recognizing that achieving sustainability is a long term, complex and multi-faceted process, companies are encouraged to report on those areas where notable progress has been made in the past year. There are many existing programs, partnerships and initiatives that focus on many of the same elements contained in the BIFMA Sustainability Guidelines. To avoid duplication of effort, a company already reporting sustainability activity through other sustainability programs is encouraged to reference those documents in its sustainability report.

Report Components:

Executive Summary

The executive summary is a brief overview of the information contained in the report. It ties together the five key elements and gives the reader an understanding of their relationships and the company's progress towards continuous improvement. Significant accomplishments, as well as awards and other forms of recognition earned during the previous year, should be included in the executive summary. Companies may also choose to include challenges faced implementing the principles.

Environmental Policy

Include the text of the company's environmental policy that incorporates sustainability. List documents, marketing materials, websites where the company's environmental policy has been made available to the stakeholders and/or the public. Companies may also choose to list any of their significant environmental goals.

Environmental Aspects

Report on the progress made in identifying and addressing significant environmental aspects. There will be a wide range in achievements reported, depending upon how long the company has utilized an Environmental Management System (EMS), and on the extent of the company's resources devoted to environmental sustainability. Initially, it may be a challenge for the company to simply identify key environmental aspects related to products, processes, and services. Next, the company may report progress in establishing a means of ranking environmental aspects in a relative order of priority. Eventually, the company may report on their progress in minimizing environmental aspects or in implementing product and process design practices which eliminate aspects altogether.

Legal and Other Requirements

Report on the progress made in identifying and addressing applicable legal requirements. There will be a wide range in achievements reported, depending upon how long the company has utilized an EMS, and on the extent of the company's resources devoted to environmental sustainability. Initially, the company may report on progress in implementing a proactive regulatory compliance approach, such as achieving compliance with new programs ahead of schedule, or working with trade associations and regulators to draft applicable regulations, or implementing a compliance and corrective action database. Eventually, the company may report on their progress in voiding environmental permits, eliminating waste streams, or replacing regulated materials with sustainable, non-hazardous materials.

Objectives and Targets

Report on the progress made in identifying and accomplishing specified objectives and targets, based upon the company's significant environmental aspects. There will be a wide range in achievements reported, depending upon how long the company has utilized an EMS, and on the extent of the company's resources devoted to environmental sustainability. Initially, the company may report on their EMS implementation progress. Next, the company may report on their efforts to aggressively reduce environmental impacts, including reductions in waste generation rates and reductions in resource consumption rates. Eventually, the company may report on their increased use of renewable energy, or their replacement of petroleum-based product constituents with rapidly renewable materials.

Management Review

Report on the progress made in completing an assessment of EMS effectiveness. There will be a wide range in achievements reported, depending upon how long the company has utilized an EMS, and on the extent of the company's resources devoted to environmental sustainability. Initially, the company may report on the changes made to their EMS, based upon recommendations from a management team review of the program. Next, the company may report the use of newly developed EMS metrics, accounting for audit findings and corrective actions, which carefully address the root causes for any system failures. Eventually, the company's executives may come to rely upon a comprehensive annual sustainability report which follows an established format (e.g. the *Global Reporting Initiative*), carefully accounting for virtually every process input and output.

Conclusion

Companies may summarize any conclusions that might be drawn from the information contained in this report and identify any specific goals and/or projects for the upcoming year.

5 Resources

Example Programs/Partnerships/Initiatives The following resources are provided as a partial list of the many available programs and organizations working on sustainable business practices.

- Global Reporting Initiative
<http://www.globalreporting.org>
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)
<http://www.wbcsd.ch>
- EPA National Environmental Performance Track Program
<http://www.epa.gov/performancetrack>
- Federal Trade Commission (FTC) “Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims”: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/buspubs/epaclaims.htm>
- The Natural Step
http://www.naturalstep.org/gateway_business.php