

VI. Environment

Enterprises should, within the framework of laws, regulations and administrative practices in the countries in which they operate, and in consideration of relevant international agreements, principles, objectives, and standards, take due account of the need to protect the environment, public health and safety, and generally to conduct their activities in a manner contributing to the wider goal of sustainable development. In particular, enterprises should:

1. Establish and maintain a system of environmental management appropriate to the enterprise, including:
 - a) collection and evaluation of adequate and timely information regarding the environmental, health, and safety impacts of their activities;
 - b) establishment of measurable objectives and, where appropriate, targets for improved environmental performance and resource utilisation, including periodically reviewing the continuing relevance of these objectives; where appropriate, targets should be consistent with relevant national policies and international environmental commitments; and
 - c) regular monitoring and verification of progress toward environmental, health, and safety objectives or targets.
2. Taking into account concerns about cost, business confidentiality, and the protection of intellectual property rights:
 - a) provide the public and workers with adequate, measureable and verifiable (where applicable) and timely information on the potential environment, health and safety impacts of the activities of the enterprise, which could include reporting on progress in improving environmental performance; and
 - b) engage in adequate and timely communication and consultation with the communities directly affected by the environmental, health and safety policies of the enterprise and by their implementation.

3. Assess, and address in decision-making, the foreseeable environmental, health, and safety-related impacts associated with the processes, goods and services of the enterprise over their full life cycle with a view to avoiding or, when unavoidable, mitigating them. Where these proposed activities may have significant environmental, health, or safety impacts, and where they are subject to a decision of a competent authority, prepare an appropriate environmental impact assessment.
4. Consistent with the scientific and technical understanding of the risks, where there are threats of serious damage to the environment, taking also into account human health and safety, not use the lack of full scientific certainty as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent or minimise such damage.
5. Maintain contingency plans for preventing, mitigating, and controlling serious environmental and health damage from their operations, including accidents and emergencies; and mechanisms for immediate reporting to the competent authorities.
6. Continually seek to improve corporate environmental performance, at the level of the enterprise and, where appropriate, of its supply chain, by encouraging such activities as:
 - a) adoption of technologies and operating procedures in all parts of the enterprise that reflect standards concerning environmental performance in the best performing part of the enterprise;
 - b) development and provision of products or services that have no undue environmental impacts; are safe in their intended use; reduce greenhouse gas emissions; are efficient in their consumption of energy and natural resources; can be reused, recycled, or disposed of safely;
 - c) promoting higher levels of awareness among customers of the environmental implications of using the products and services of the enterprise, including, by providing accurate information on their products (for example, on greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity, resource efficiency, or other environmental issues); and
 - d) exploring and assessing ways of improving the environmental performance of the enterprise over the longer term, for instance by developing strategies for emission reduction, efficient resource utilisation and recycling, substitution or reduction of use of toxic substances, or strategies on biodiversity.

7. Provide adequate education and training to workers in environmental health and safety matters, including the handling of hazardous materials and the prevention of environmental accidents, as well as more general environmental management areas, such as environmental impact assessment procedures, public relations, and environmental technologies.
8. Contribute to the development of environmentally meaningful and economically efficient public policy, for example, by means of partnerships or initiatives that will enhance environmental awareness and protection.

Commentary on the Environment

60. The text of the Environment Chapter broadly reflects the principles and objectives contained in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, in Agenda 21 (within the Rio Declaration). It also takes into account the (Aarhus) Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters and reflects standards contained in such instruments as the ISO Standard on Environmental Management Systems.
61. Sound environmental management is an important part of sustainable development, and is increasingly being seen as both a business responsibility and a business opportunity. Multinational enterprises have a role to play in both respects. Managers of these enterprises should therefore give appropriate attention to environmental issues within their business strategies. Improving environmental performance requires a commitment to a systematic approach and to continual improvement of the system. An environmental management system provides the internal framework necessary to control an enterprise's environmental impacts and to integrate environmental considerations into business operations. Having such a system in place should help to assure shareholders, employees and the community that the enterprise is actively working to protect the environment from the impacts of its activities.
62. In addition to improving environmental performance, instituting an environmental management system can provide economic benefits to companies through reduced operating and insurance costs, improved energy and resource conservation, reduced compliance and liability charges, improved access to capital and skills, improved customer satisfaction, and improved community and public relations.

63. In the context of these *Guidelines*, “sound environmental management” should be interpreted in its broadest sense, embodying activities aimed at controlling both direct and indirect environmental impacts of enterprise activities over the long-term, and involving both pollution control and resource management elements.
64. In most enterprises, an internal control system is needed to manage the enterprise’s activities. The environmental part of this system may include such elements as targets for improved performance and regular monitoring of progress towards these targets.
65. Information about the activities of enterprises and about their relationships with sub-contractors and their suppliers, and associated environmental impacts is an important vehicle for building confidence with the public. This vehicle is most effective when information is provided in a transparent manner and when it encourages active consultation with stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, contractors, local communities and with the public-at-large so as to promote a climate of long-term trust and understanding on environmental issues of mutual interest. Reporting and communication are particularly appropriate where scarce or at risk environmental assets are at stake either in a regional, national or international context; reporting standards such as the Global Reporting Initiative provide useful references.
66. In providing accurate information on their products, enterprises have several options such as voluntary labelling or certification schemes. In using these instruments enterprises should take due account of their social and economic effects on developing countries and of existing internationally recognised standards.
67. Normal business activity can involve the *ex ante* assessment of the potential environmental impacts associated with the enterprise’s activities. Enterprises often carry out appropriate environmental impact assessments, even if they are not required by law. Environmental assessments made by the enterprise may contain a broad and forward-looking view of the potential impacts of an enterprise’s activities and of activities of sub-contractors and suppliers, addressing relevant impacts and examining alternatives and mitigation measures to avoid or redress adverse impacts. The *Guidelines* also recognise that multinational enterprises have certain responsibilities in other parts of the product life cycle.
68. Several instruments already adopted by countries adhering to the *Guidelines*, including Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, enunciate a “precautionary approach”.

None of these instruments is explicitly addressed to enterprises, although enterprise contributions are implicit in all of them.

69. The basic premise of the *Guidelines* is that enterprises should act as soon as possible, and in a proactive way, to avoid, for instance, serious or irreversible environmental damages resulting from their activities. However, the fact that the *Guidelines* are addressed to enterprises means that no existing instrument is completely adequate for expressing this recommendation. The *Guidelines* therefore draw upon, but do not completely mirror, any existing instrument.
70. The *Guidelines* are not intended to reinterpret any existing instruments or to create new commitments or precedents on the part of governments – they are intended only to recommend how the precautionary approach should be implemented at the level of enterprises. Given the early stage of this process, it is recognised that some flexibility is needed in its application, based on the specific context in which it is carried out. It is also recognised that governments determine the basic framework in this field, and have the responsibility to consult periodically with stakeholders on the most appropriate ways forward.
71. The *Guidelines* also encourage enterprises to work to raise the level of environmental performance in all parts of their operations, even where this may not be formally required by existing practice in the countries in which they operate. In this regard, enterprises should take due account of their social and economic effects on developing countries.
72. For example, multinational enterprises often have access to existing and innovative technologies or operating procedures which could, if applied, help raise environmental performance overall. Multinational enterprises are frequently regarded as leaders in their respective fields, so the potential for a “demonstration effect” on other enterprises should not be overlooked. Ensuring that the environment of the countries in which multinational enterprises operate also benefit from available and innovative technologies and practices, is an important way of building support for international investment activities more generally.
73. Enterprises have an important role to play in the training and education of their employees with regard to environmental matters. They are encouraged to discharge this responsibility in as broad a manner as possible, especially in areas directly related to human health and safety.