



UNIT-13

Sustainability and Use of resources

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Unit 13

Sustainability and Use of resources

What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is increasingly becoming an integral part of the FM role and most Sustainability Managers are now found in the FM or resources department. In a larger organisation the Sustainability Manager is often an entirely separate role because of the complex issues involved. So what is sustainability in the context of a busy FM department?

Sustainability means different things to different people and, as far as a busy FM department is concerned, it can become an integral part of everything that you do. If you are expected to take the lead on sustainability, you need to define what areas you are going to concentrate on, what specialists you need to bring in, and how you are going to report your progress back to the senior management team. All FM departments buy in services for the site. Do we ever stop to think about the environmental impact of these services and supplies, e.g. the amount of carbon that has been used in their journey from source, Note to self through manufacture to your doorstep? Do we ever consider alternatives or even really consider sustainability as a real issue? The answer is probably no. Actually we should definitely consider sustainability as part of our role.

The concept of sustainability has become increasingly important in recent years as we all try to reduce the resource intensity of our day-to-day lives. For hundreds of years we have been plundering the Earth's resources without much concern, but we now know that these resources are finite. Our growing population has experienced an explosion of consumerism and our planet's resources have dwindled to the point where, within a few years, we will face a catastrophic decline in the availability of fuel and raw materials.

The simple truth is that we cannot continue in this fashion without reducing our reliance on fossil fuels and giving greater consideration to how we can reduce the resource intensity of our actions.

How does this then affect individual organisations? Quite simply, we need to re-evaluate our systems to make sure we reduce resource consumption and, in particular, our use of carbon. This does take time and can be costly but, if undertaken correctly, this evaluation could bring the following benefits to your department.

- Reduce your carbon footprint.
- Raise the profile of the FM department.
- Save money, as waste is cash intensive.

- Give your organisation a marketing advantage over competitors.
- Show due diligence.
- Reduce your long-term reliance on fossil fuels.
- Increase your long-term robustness and reduce vulnerability with respect to utilities costs.
- Give an edge with key partners in terms of funding. An organisation which is seen to be managing its carbon use proactively shows that it is managing waste. When applying for grants or capital funding, a formulated carbon plan will give you the edge.

Sustainability in any business environment can be a journey of discovery, but also sometimes horror when you realise what you are using and what impact this is having on the environment. As with any journey, we must first establish our baseline so we can plot a course for the future. We must try to identify all the areas within the organisation where we use a resource and then calculate its impact on the organisation.

Improving the Sustainability of your organization

The logical stages to follow to increase the sustainability of your organisation are: identify all the resources used; convert these resources into a carbon figure; set a bench-mark figure; set future targets; and report progress and review.

Identification of resources used

This can be one of the most difficult areas to define. It will vary between organisations and may fall under the remit of more than one department. However, as one of the prime users of resources, the FM department should take the lead on this if there is no Sustainability Manager in post.

Utilities

The use of gas and electricity in an organisation is likely to be the second highest expenditure after staff costs. Increasingly, as sites become more sophisticated and acquire more technologies, electricity consumption increases as we move from naturally vented low-tech buildings to pressure-sealed environments that require mechanical cooling and ventilation. This is coupled with an increased reliance on computer technology, which adds to the cost of your utilities. New buildings, far from reducing your overall electricity consumption, may double it. You cannot really avoid this, unfortunately, but you can control the efficiency of all of the M & E equipment in the building.

Waste

What waste streams does the organisation create? These could be as follows: general waste which cannot be recycled; recyclable waste, e.g. paper, card, packaging; plastics and tins; waste electrical equipment (WEE); specialist waste, the disposal of which is covered by specific pieces of legislation, such as batteries, fluorescent lighting tubes, oil and oil products and asbestos; and food waste.

Setting future targets

You need to have targets to work to. Targets can sometimes be purely aspirations; this is an easy trap to fall into. If you set yourself difficult targets, you are setting yourself up for failure. You should always under-promise and over-perform. There is nothing more demoralising than to miss a target because you have been unrealistic. Set reasonable targets and exceed them if necessary. If you over-promise and under-perform, senior managers will be less inclined to believe any future targets you set. Use the SMARTER methodology for setting targets.

Reporting Progress and reviewing results

You need to report your successes, particularly if they have created a financial saving. Use this to your best advantage, as some of your future projects may need capital funding and initial success means you are more likely to receive support from the finance director. Your reports should be simple and effective to achieve maximum effect. Avoid too much data. Dashboard-type reports seem to be the best and most eye-catching reports and these use a ragging (red, amber, green) system to report progress. You need to be honest in these reports as you can make your data say anything. Keep it simple and under-report as this then gives you more latitude the following year.

Sustainability: a whole organisation approach

Sustainability is a major topic for the practising Facilities Manager and can have a massive impact on your bottom line. If you ignore sustainability, you will suffer in the long term and put your organisation at risk. Engaging with the whole organisation is extremely important.

Staff need to understand some of the basics about sustainability before you can truly connect with them and influence their behavior.

The key areas include the following.

- How much carbon do we create? Staff need to understand the amount of carbon the organisation uses and how it is used. There is no point providing lots of data as this will only confuse people and your target audience will lose interest. Use simple bar or pie charts to show the relationship between consumption and carbon.
- How much does carbon consumption cost? Carbon consumption is a difficult concept to understand. We don't take the carbon away in trucks; it just gently floats off into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide emissions. If you represent your reductions in carbon emissions as potential financial savings, staff will easily see the connection between money and their actions, particularly in times of austerity when they can directly equate money wasted with potential job losses.

Further Reading: