

The following report has been compiled with input from members of the Cleaning & Hygiene Suppliers Association. The report outlines some of the ethically and environmentally sustainable initiatives prevalent in the industry today. It provides guidance to buyers of cleaning and hygiene products on how to make sure they get sustainable solutions and on greenwashing pitfalls.

What are the major carbon-reduction initiatives / changes taking place in the industry?

Overall philosophy

- Moving towards a circular economy.
 - Developing a circular economy requires systemic change. Material and energy streams both need to be optimised to support the best environmental performance on a system level.
 - Reduce, re-use, recycle.
 - Note, sustainability initiatives may add to the cost of production.

Product

- Product design.
 - Recyclability at the end of the life cycle is increasingly key. Product alternatives, such as concentrates and dosing systems versus ready-to-use formulations are being introduced.
- Materials used in manufacture.
 - In paper manufacture, fresh fibre, the source of which must be sustainable, offers high quality and creates little waste at the mill. This needs to be considered when comparing to recycled fibre, which requires transportation and creation.
 - The use of recycled polyethylene is growing. It reduces the amount of plastic waste in the environment and saves energy and resources compared to producing new polyethylene from raw materials. The incorporation of a minimum of 30% recycled plastics in packaging is the most significant attempt to reduce the use of virgin plastic.
 - In plastic sacks, there is a focus on reducing the volume of all materials used and a switch to bio-based materials. Blends are also being optimised to reduce additives.
 - The traditional cotton used in, for example, cotton mops, is made from textile waste, which is extremely ecological and so may be the more sustainable option.
 - There has traditionally been a reliance on single-use, disposable items. Sustainable alternatives, such as cleaning textiles that can be laundered in place of single-use non-woven wipes, are available.
 - The use of glass, metal or paper containers for cleaning chemicals in place of UK recycled plastic is increasing. Beware however, as this may increase the carbon footprint.

Packaging

- Packaging design.
 - Recyclability or reuse at the end of the life cycle is increasingly key.
 - The amount of packaging is being minimised. Less packaging means more storage.
 - Designs are evolving to reduce the amount of packaging.
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).
 - EPR requires the producers of packaging to be responsible for their post-consumer product. It means they are responsible for the cost of disposing of the packaging once the product has been consumed. This is leading to investment to facilitate the removal of single use plastic packaging.

Distribution

- The vehicles.
 - There is investment in energy efficient vehicles and electric vehicles.
- Improved delivery efficiency.
 - Route planning software is reducing transport miles.
 - Orders are being consolidated to achieve, for example, MAQs for cleaning chemicals (Maximum Allowable Quantities).
 - Culture change is being encouraged so customers plan ahead and accept larger / less frequent / less urgent deliveries.

Social values and ethics

- Supplier selection.
 - Distributors are increasingly selecting suppliers based on their approach to carbon reduction and the initiatives they have in place. Those with a robust plan, clear priorities, targets and a strategy for achieving them score higher in the assessment process.

Corporate environmental impact

- Investment in renewable energy, including onsite generation.
 - Many manufacturing processes, including polythene production, are energy intensive. To reduce carbon emissions, many companies are adopting renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power to power their operations.
- Improving energy efficiency.
 - Companies are investing in technologies and processes that improve energy efficiency. This can include improvements in production equipment as well as steps as simple as switching to LED lighting or online meetings.
- Carbon reduction.
 - Addressing day-to-day activities, for example, turning computers and lights off at night, and using eco settings on devices.
 - Measurement is key as many manufacturers do not have all the data on Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.
 - Carbon reduction plans should be recognised to PAS 2060, an internationally recognised standard. There is currently no ISO standard for carbon neutrality.

Corporate environmental impact (cont.)

- Carbon capture and off-setting
 - Some companies are exploring carbon capture and utilization technologies to capture carbon emissions.
 - Some organisations are also partnering with carbon off-set projects.
- Waste minimisation.
 - Companies are investing in technologies and processes that improve energy efficiency. This can include improvements in production equipment as well as steps as simple as switching to LED lighting or online meetings.

What types of initiative/ approach should be specified in tenders?

General approach

- Develop a consistent approach for responsible supplier assessment.
- Create a code of conduct and assess suppliers against it.

Sustainability strategy

- Require your supplier to have a sustainability strategy / plan / roadmap, which includes:
 - Lifecycle analysis of carbon emissions, quantified and measured independently. It will encompass where the product is made, the energy source, distance travelled and end of life recyclability
 - Substantive initiatives for reducing carbon emissions throughout the lifecycle. This may include the adoption of energy-efficient technologies and progresses and making sure the carbon used in the manufacturing process is sustainable (wind, solar, hydrogen, biomass, etc).
 - Mapping of Scopes 1, 2 and 3 emissions and a plan for cutting them, which should include engagement with suppliers.
 - Strategies for using less product, end-of-life solutions for products, and moving towards a circular economy.
 - Information on plastics used and recycled content.
 - A plan for delivering sustainable packaging.
- Require your supplier to state their Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) ambitions. These need to positively impact day-to-day operations.
- Ask for information on the resources committed to sustainability initiatives. It will indicate the commitment of the organisation.
- Require information on non-product based initiatives, covering, for example, social value and biodiversity.
- Specify the implementation of waste reduction initiatives such as recycling, reuse and composting.
- Ask for information on endorsements the business has received or has made a formal commitment to, for example the UN Sustainability Goals and SBTi.
- All necessary certificates, professional memberships, ISO accreditations should be requested to corroborate the suppliers' submissions and kept on file.

Measurement and evaluation

- Require the evaluation of waste generated and the recyclability of waste.
- Require the collation of CO₂ data for product manufacture and transport from the factory gate.
- The carbon emissions should be measured by product so the buyer can make comparisons and select the lowest carbon solution. The carbon emissions should also be available at a case level to allow the measurement of Scope 1 and 2 emissions.
- Audit recycled content. Encourage suppliers to state the accurate percentage of recycled product, which should be independently verified by an external auditor.

Endorsements and certifications

- Independent certifications are required.
 - For example, FSC or PEFC (responsible forestry, sustainable sourcing and chain of custody).
 - ISO 9001; ISO 14001.
 - EcoVadis, CDP and Sedex are tools that monitor your supply chain's sustainability.
 - CHSA.

Product and packaging

- Require proof of continuity of supply of raw materials.
- Specify the durability and longevity of traditional materials versus newer recycled materials. The latter may not meet the specification.
- Consider the use of UK recycled plastic containers. This may be the sustainable option.
- Single use plastic packaging should be replaced with sustainable, recycled, recyclable and compostable options, now these alternatives exist. Also, confirm manufacturers are fully aware of their obligations under the Extended Producer Regulations.
- Encourage the use of sustainable packaging to reduce the amount of waste generated by the product.

Price and best value

- Best value should include environmental credentials. Price often means environmental products are excluded.
- The market for cotton-based products and mops is extremely price driven. Be prepared to pay a premium for recycled content and other sustainable initiatives.

Ongoing monitoring

- Implement quality assurance checks post award of the tender.
- Complete checks post award of the tender to ensure the supplier adheres to relevant Government guidelines and legislation. This should include site visits and relevant audits.

What should buyers be aware of / avoid? For example, how do they identify greenwashing claims?

Green Claims Code

Check the Competition & Markets Authority's Green Claims Code to spot greenwashing.

- Claims must be truthful and accurate.
- Claims must be clear and unambiguous.
- Claims must not omit or hide important, relevant information.
- Comparisons must be fair and meaningful.
- Claims must consider the full lifecycle of the product or service.
- Claims must be substantiated.

Be informed

- Know and understand legislative developments, for example Extended Producer Responsibility.
- Be familiar with recognised certifications.

Research the company

- Interrogate the company's sustainability objectives and projects being undertaken. Seek, for example:
 - Information showing awareness and education initiatives supporting the green products.
 - Evidence demonstrating the policies and procedures are being putting into practice. These may include third party testimonials.
 - Evidence demonstrating savings in transportation, carbon emissions, storage reduction, waste reduction etc.
 - Ready access to 'green' information/calculations of the product life cycle and resources, i.e. online portals, websites etc.
 - Seek quantitative as well as qualitative measures.
 - Try to understand the complete value chain. For example, packaging is a key topic but only accounts for about 2% of tissue emissions. Understand the product and its impact from a total perspective.
- Confirm partnerships.
 - The partnering organisation should be disclosed where there are claims of offsetting, tree planting, donations etc.
- Check its website for information on sustainability practices and initiatives. Look for independent news articles and reports on their environmental impact.

Interrogate claims

- Do not take them at face value. Challenge them and seek valid supporting evidence.
- Claims such as 'carbon neutral' or 'net zero' need to be investigated.
 - How is the carbon neutrality gained? Is it achieved by carbon offsetting?
 - Is the supplier cutting fossil fuel emissions and making efforts to minimise harms and allocating resources to improvement or just compensating emissions after the event?
 - 'Net-zero' claims should be based on the international net-zero standard <https://sciencebasedtargets.org/net-zero> or other reliable third party verified certification.
- Beware absolute claims.
 - It is impossible to have, for example, zero environmental impact or be 100% sustainable and no plastic sack is made from 100% recycled material as all include fillers like chalk.
- Beware vague, meaningless, misleading or broad claims and the use of loose terminology.
 - Seek precise definitions and specific supporting information.
- Seek formal certifications and accreditations, requesting the certificate or confirming the claim with the accrediting organisation.
 - They mean the product has met specific environmental standards and include Energy Star, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), or Cradle to Cradle (C2C).

Consider the entire lifecycle

- Greenwashing claims often focus on one aspect of the product's lifecycle while ignoring other aspects such as transport, disposal or the use of hazardous materials.
- Ask about the source of recycled materials.
- Understand the country of origin and the associated impact on sustainability. Product mileage, and the carbon emissions involved, should be considered when understanding the impact of a product.

General

- Request minimal and / or recyclable packaging.
- Check the item on the tender is the one supplied.
- Review relevant documentation regularly, for example annually.