

Last issue *WME* published Part One of its own experience of the environmental review process. Now we ponder ways to address the impacts we quantified. By Richard Collins.

Cleaning up our own backyard

Drawing up an environment risk register for a company is in many ways the easy part. It may require a bit of legwork – OK, a lot in the case of complex manufacturers – but it is in the main an exercise in gathering and categorising data. More delicate is the next step, where the rubber hits the road and priority issues and actions have to be determined. The environmental risks have to be juggled with competing interests and resources, plus the company's ability to influence an impact and how far it is reasonable to go in modifying business activity to achieve a result.

As outlined last month, *WME* approached Aaron Westwood of sustainability consultancy Graham A Browne to help determine our environmental footprint and ways to reduce it. We drew up an Environmental Risk Register to help calculate the company's main environmental risks, defined as a function of severity times likelihood.

Top of the list were the use of paper and plastic wrap in producing the magazine, plus greenhouse gas emissions from employee travel and shipping (see *WME*, November 2005). We had already addressed the first two to some degree but had assumed the greenhouse gas profile from an office-based business would not be significant.

So what to do? The key guide in prioritising action is the control hierarchy, a framework which ranks the steps to address any particular aspect: first eliminate the activity then substitute it, try setting up engineered controls followed by administrative controls and, as a last resort, implement any protective measures. It proved useful in structuring our thinking and would be particularly important in more complex businesses than *WME*. But it also tended to make the project process-driven rather than focused on outcomes. For example, it didn't allow consideration of offsetting our greenhouse emissions, a mechanism Aaron explained was outside the formal scope of the business to influence or control (see box).



Dynamic Press has an EMS and continuous improvement culture.

Influencing suppliers

WME's most significant and controllable environmental impacts are through our two main suppliers, the printing (Dynamic Press) and mailing services (D&D).

Many progressive firms are recognising some of their biggest impacts may be among smaller suppliers and are bringing their purchasing decisions into play. Swedish auto-maker Volvo demands all suppliers meet stringent criteria and puts its policy on-line, including white, grey and black lists for chemicals that are acceptable, have limited approval and banned altogether.

"As a major part of the total value of our products is produced and, in many cases designed, by our suppliers, a truly holistic view means that every link in the chain of supply is equally responsible for the best possible environmental care," states its Purchasing Quality Procedure.

It is not as easy for smaller companies without the weight of million-dollar accounts to influence suppliers. This was certainly the case regarding the plastic wrap protecting the magazine. One alternative was a milky white, biodegradable plastic, but the mailing house would not

run it when we investigated options several years ago, mainly due to technical shortcomings in the strength of the plastic but also the change-over time required for a low-volume run.

There are steps any company can take, however, and *WME* plans to pursue them. Aaron says it is best to integrate environmental measures into the business planning process rather than as bolt-on requirements that are easy to sideline. Include environmental considerations in new supply contracts, for example, make that part of job descriptions and personnel reviews, budget resources for supplier audits and set aside specific time to monitor progress.

Direct lessons

One of the key tips is to keep looking for continuous improvement, a common mantra among environment types and one that makes more sense to me now. Three years ago we asked Dynamic to look into paper specifications (and adopted a lighter weight, 80 gsm paper to reduce resource use and transport impacts), but we did not revisit the issue when the contract came up 18 months later (though we did beef up the other envi-

ronmental criteria). Formalising environmental requirements in our contracts will keep them on the radar for both WME and our suppliers, helping drive continuous improvement.

Aaron had another tip: avoid contract variances mid-term where possible and give existing suppliers as much warning as possible of any new requirements come renewal, especially if it's a major change.

"Telling your supplier what you are planning will make them less surprised, feel more included and allow them to work towards any changes. This may also mean liaising with a different person, such as the environment manager, rather than the sales rep or account manager," he said.

Once the contract is signed, the level of subsequent engagement through the life of the contract will vary case by case. The printer has significant environmental risks which require greater scrutiny than the mailing house. Aaron's advice in this case is to ask high-risk suppliers to complete an annual self-assessment survey, backed up by a site visit every two years to audit

FACT FILE **To offset or not to offset?**

One of the most interesting debates was over the merits of investing in projects that offset environmental impacts. Aaron remains skeptical about organisations portraying a lower risk for one media because they offset an impact in another.

However, businesses will always have residual environmental impacts which cannot be addressed through the control hierarchy. We determined there was little we could do regarding transporting the magazine or travelling to visit sites and

advertisers, and so decided to offset WME's carbon emissions through Greenfleet, a Victorian company that plants trees to absorb the emissions.

We entered our key stats into its on-line Tree Calculator: 39,500 km in car use per year, 50 domestic flights and four international, plus office electricity use. WME generates 56.09 tonnes of CO2 equivalent a year, requiring 210 trees to offset the emissions at a total cost to WME of \$494.13 a year.

More: www.greenfleet.com.au

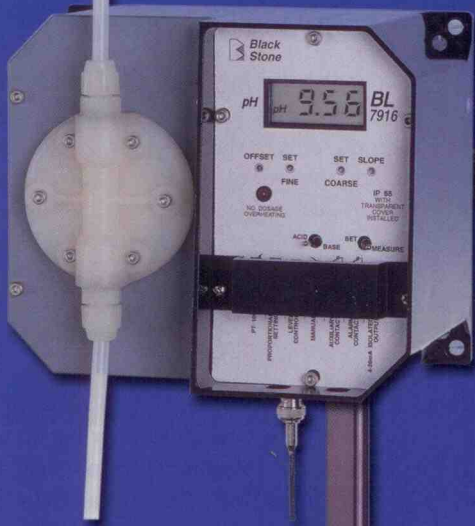
them against each clause in the contract, including checking the order forms for the paper supply, sighting the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) on the ink they use and verifying operational controls. Low-risk suppliers such as the mail house could just be asked to fill in a short checklist every two years.

As a result of the review, direct measures we plan to introduce at WME include introducing recyclable logo on the

magazine address sheets, exploring the opportunity to move products such as Australia's Environment Industry Directory on-line within 2-3 years, and focusing on incremental, continuous improvement. Publisher Ross May has been designated the company's environmental champion.

Download Volvo's environmental requirement survey at <http://tinyurl.com/7reto> **WME**

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