

# Auckland Zoo tips for business sustainability

As a business, Auckland Zoo has unique environmental issues to address, such as the disposal of animal waste, large water demands (for aquatic species and our moat system) and energy demands associated with housing tropical animals. We also have a significant stream running directly through our operations, which empties via an estuary to the Waitemata Harbour.

There are several systems in place to ensure that, as a business, we are not undermining our goal of environmental responsibility. These systems are applicable to any business of virtually any size interested in reducing their environmental footprint.

## **1. Create an environmental policy.**

Policies are designed to set out guiding principles for the entire organisation and to guide the business and its employees in their daily activities. Generally, an environmental policy is a short (single page) document outlining management commitments. You may wish to make this publicly available, as Auckland Zoo has, in which case it should be easily understandable and non-technical. An environmental policy should be created by top management and communicated to all employees and contractors working for or on behalf of the organisation.

## **2. Establish an interest group**

Auckland Zoo's 'Green Team' is a group of staff members with an interest in sustainability, who champion the cause within the Zoo. This group has support from top management and is allocated resources to achieve goals set out in monthly meetings. The Green Team identifies priority issues to tackle, researches green options, conducts audits, helps to implement the environmental policy and generally creates an atmosphere of awareness within the business. Membership should be as diverse as possible. Auckland Zoo's Green Team has members from the Life Sciences, Maintenance, Education, Wild Zone Gift Shop, Visitor Experience, ZooDoo, Marketing, and NZCCM staff.

## **3. Monitor resource use and waste output**

What gets measured gets managed. Auckland Zoo uses an online measuring service called Livedata to provide readings of all power, gas and water consumption. This enables us to identify leaks and peaks and to deal with them as they arise. Measuring can easily be done with monthly electricity or landfill bills. When starting down the road of improving the environmental performance of a business, it is crucial to have baseline data of waste outputs and consumption. This provides a base against which future improvements can be measured.

#### **4. Engage with staff**

Be inclusive when looking for ways to improve your environmental sustainability. Involve all staff and volunteers at all stages. When implementing new environmental standards, staff will be asked to change the way they currently work, so their support is vital. The 'people on the ground' have the best chance of identifying opportunities for environmental improvements around a business. There are many benefits to improving environmental performance – communicating these to all staff members will encourage buy-in at all levels. Benefits include reduced operational costs, improved staff morale and public image, and better relationships with suppliers and local community.

#### **5. Incorporate environmental aspects into existing health and safety systems**

There is no point in reinventing the wheel. Many practices for managing the environmental impacts of your business may already be in place in the existing health and safety system. Auckland Zoo's accident/incident forms also apply to environmental incidents or 'near misses'. This provides a formal structure for employees wishing to highlight an environmental issue, impact or opportunity for improvement. Combining the two systems, where possible, also streamlines the induction process for new employees and contractors.

## **6. Create an aspects/impacts register**

Sustainable business management begins with understanding the issues. An environmental aspect is any element of an organisation's activities, products or services that can interact with the environment. An impact is any change to the environment resulting from an organisation's aspects. Creating a simple register of all the ways in which your business impacts upon the environment means that you can assign significance to the impacts and select which ones to manage. Things to include may be storage and disposal of waste, releasing air emissions, energy, water and resource use, pollutants to drain and loss of biodiversity.

## **7. Stay a step ahead**

Rather than doing the bare minimum to comply with legislation, consider what you as a business can achieve for the environment. The extra steps that Auckland Zoo has taken have not only reduced our environmental risk, but have greatly improved our image as a conservation centre. With government committing to sustainable development, more legislation is around the corner. The old ways of doing business are coming to an end. By putting in place extra measures today, you are setting yourself up for a smoother transition into the future and becoming a more positive member of society.

## **8. Formalise your environmental management system (EMS)**

An EMS is a set of procedures and practices that enables a business to reduce its impacts on the environment and increase its operating efficiency. Developing an EMS is a structured way to reach sustainability goals. Auckland Zoo has attained ISO14001 certification. This is a comprehensive global standard for an EMS, which stipulates that all members of the organisation participate in environmental protection. It specifies requirements for an EMS, which will enable a business to develop and implement a policy and objectives that take into account legal requirements and environmental aspects.

## **9. Get the basics right**

There is no single 'right' way to incorporate sustainable practice into a business. It is completely up to you how far down the track you want to go. At the very least, sustainability is about getting the basics right. Ensure that everyone is recycling (particularly paper), consider installing a worm farm or composting system, set your printing default to double-sided, add a note to email signatures discouraging the printing of emails, install half-flush devices on toilets, buy products that are designed to last, replace chemical cleaners with biodegradable products, use only recycled paper, use energy efficient light-bulbs or invest in a coffee machine to reduce takeaway-cup use. All of these things that may appear simple common sense are, in fact, allowing you to practise sustainability.

## **10. Have patience and persistence**

A business will not become sustainable overnight. Although Auckland Zoo has made environmental leaps and bounds since 2000, we are the first to admit we still have challenges to address. There is a lot of trial and error involved in implementing new programmes and initiatives. If it does not work smoothly right away, do not be discouraged. There will naturally be resistance to change within any organisation. Keep people educated on the issues and on the benefits of the change, rather than making them feel as though they are being forced into things. Have faith in your intentions for implementing change – the end result is positive for the environment, the business and its employees.