



## Guidance

# Environmental Sustainability

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This guidance provides an introduction to the issue of environmental sustainability and how it relates to eye care. It makes some suggestions for the steps that national associations can take and the information they could provide for their members. It also provides links to further information for eye care professionals and optical businesses. This guidance can itself also be adapted for use by national associations.

### 1. What do we know?

- Taking action to become more environmentally sustainable isn't just an option, it is essential. It matters to a growing number of customers/patients. And governments will increasingly regulate in this area.
- We all need to change our behaviour, in everyday life, professional practice and business. We encourage eyecare professionals to be at the forefront, championing good practice.
- Education is key – for ourselves, our staff, patients, suppliers
- Many national associations, eye care professionals and optical practices have already started to take action. These actions can be built on and learned from.

### 2. What is environmental sustainability and what do we all need to do?

According to the U.N. Environment Programme, environmental sustainability involves making life choices that ensure an equal, if not better, way of life for future generations. It imposes on all the responsibility to conserve natural resources and protect global ecosystems to support health and wellbeing, now and in the future. Because so many decisions that impact the environment are not felt immediately, a key element of environmental sustainability is its forward-looking nature. In short, it means meeting our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Environmental concerns that need to be addressed include (but are not limited to):

- Climate change/global warming
  - Energy use and emissions
  - Travel and transport
- Consumption of resources
  - Water
- Waste management
  - Packaging
  - Plastics and micro-plastics

With the [European Green Deal](#), launched in December 2019, all 27 EU Member States committed to turning the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050. To get there, they pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. The Commission has published details of a number of measures to meet this target and more can be expected. Legislative proposals include requirements for products to be sustainable, and measures to empower consumers to make environmentally sustainable choices, including stopping “greenwashing” by ensuring that environmental claims can be substantiated.

The pressure for action comes not just from governments and regulatory requirements. More and more people are trying to live their lives more sustainably and they expect businesses and professionals to do the same. So eye care professionals will be challenged by patients to explain what steps they have taken to provide a more sustainable service, as well as by governments and regulators.

### **3. Are there any issues specific to eyecare?**

The World Health Organization has stated that climate change affects the [social and environmental determinants of health](#). And in 2021 the [Lancet Commission on Global Eye Health](#) added planetary health as a key component to improving quality of eye care.

Some examples specific to the field of eye health:

- Climate change is likely to increase the incidence of some eye diseases such as trachoma infections, vitamin A deficiency, cataracts, severe allergic eye disease, glaucoma and eye injuries.
- In some places delivery of eye care will be affected because of the increased frequency of extreme weather events.

There are also aspects of the delivery of eyecare which present particular environmental challenges:

- Healthcare is a major consumer of resources and emitter of greenhouse gas emissions.
- The optical business model is predicated on promoting consumption of goods – encouraging patients to regularly replace their spectacles, with all the consequences that has in terms of manufacturing, packaging, use of resources and waste management.
- Plastic waste is a particular problem in the optical sector – e.g. packaging, dummy lenses, old frames and lenses and contact lenses.

The UK Optical Suppliers’ Association has provided a [glossary](#) which explains many of the terms used when environmental sustainability is discussed, including explanations which relate specifically to products in the optical industry (e.g. in the manufacture of frames and lenses).

### **4. The role of national associations**

People and organisations are all at different stages on the route towards sustainable practice. Some have been trying to address environmental concerns for some time, while others are now stepping up.

National organisations can play an important role by:

- Providing information explaining what is meant by environmental sustainability and why it matters.

- Providing information and resources that give advice and ideas on the steps eye care professionals and practices can take to reduce their environmental impact.
- Liaising with industry bodies to encourage them
  - to provide information on their products and
  - to provide more sustainable products.
- Providing input to and keeping members informed of new environmental legislation that will affect how services are delivered to patients.
- Demonstrating commitment to good practice in their own day to day operations.

## 5. What information and advice should you provide for eye care providers?

Some ECOO members are already active in this field, for example, the ABDO [SEE hub](#) makes freely available a range of resources including a sustainability self-assessment tool and guidance to becoming a sustainable practice.

National associations can also provide their members with advice on sourcing, recycling and disposing of spectacles and contact lenses. Different schemes are likely to operate in different countries. Some are supported by industry, such as the EUROMCONTACT Contact Lenses [See Green campaign](#).

National associations can also encourage eye care providers to ensure that environmental sustainability is part of the patient experience, for example eye care providers can:

- Provide products that are more environmentally sustainable and promote them as such
- Explain what environmental actions they are taking and why – e.g. if they are no longer using dummy lenses, or not automatically providing a new case for spectacles.
- Give information to patients about safe disposal of contact lenses and how to recycle spectacles.

The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) have published a [Call to Action](#) and a [Guide](#) for Environmentally Sensitive Practices in the Eye Health Sector which provides further information and ideas.

## 6. What about the business implications of sustainability?

Optical practices should also address sustainability issues more generally. Moving to a more sustainable business model may incur some additional costs but can also result in savings – for example with lower energy bills – and marketing opportunities, promoting the actions the business is taking.

Optical practices, like any other business, should be asking questions such as:

- What is the carbon footprint of the business and how can it be reduced?
- How energy efficient is the practice?
- Is recycling standard?
- Are staff engaged with measures to improve environmental sustainability?
- Is a shop-refit or re-branding exercise necessary if it incurs extra wastage?

A variety of tools are available to help businesses review and improve their practices (not specific to the optical sector – see section 7 below).

## 7. Sources of information

ABDO [SEE hub](#)

EUROMCONTACT Contact Lenses [See Green campaign](#)

[European Green Deal](#)

IAPB [Call to Action](#) and [Guide](#) for Environmentally Sensitive Practices in the Eye Health Sector

[Lancet Commission on Global Eye Health](#)

Optical Suppliers' Association [glossary](#) of environmental sustainability.

World Health Organization [social and environmental determinants of health](#)

A variety of different tools are available to help businesses understand measure their carbon footprint, these include:

- [How to Measure, Reduce, and Offset your Company's Carbon Footprint - FutureLearn](#)
- [Planet Mark | Sustainability Certification | Carbon & Social Measurement](#)
- [Net Zero Advisors | Guiding You On Your Net Zero Carbon Journey \(plannetzero.org\)](#)
- [Climate Action Plans & Business Sustainability | The Carbon Trust](#)
- [Carbon Footprinting for Healthcare | Centre for Sustainable Healthcare](#)
- [Measure your impact | WWF \(panda.org\)](#)
- [carbonfootprint.com - Carbon Footprint Calculator](#)
- [Reducing Your Carbon Footprint - The SME Guide | RMS \(retailmerchantservices.co.uk\)](#)

### About ECOO

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) is the European organisation which represents the interests of optometrists and opticians from 21 countries. Its members together represent more than 150,000 opticians and optometrists across Europe. ECOO aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.

ECOO is committed to providing information and resources for members on environmental sustainability. These can then be used to help optical practices and professionals across Europe, better understand the issues, how they may relate to eye care, and what steps they can take to address these concerns in their own practice.