

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Statement by

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“Sharing Lessons and Best Practices on Sustainability Initiatives”

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In his first month in office Prime Minister David Cameron stated that he wanted to be the greenest government ever, in terms of both our external policies and internal practice.

A key component of our work is to push for a global deal on climate change through the UN. The Durban conference represents a significant step forward. It has preserved the invaluable legal framework of the Kyoto Protocol, while at the same time opening the path to a new, more comprehensive and more ambitious global agreement.

Domestically too we are pursuing a range of policies to increase energy efficiency and reduce emissions.

But we are also committed to putting our policies into practice ourselves in the way the government operates. Ensuring we practice what we preach.

This means setting and meeting ambitious goals but also being transparent, sharing best practice and encouraging innovation.

The government established ambitious five year goals in four specific areas of government operations and public procurement: (all by 2015)

- reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 25% (including domestic estate and transport);
- reduce refuse by 25%;
- reduce office water consumption;
- ensure more sustainable and efficient procurement.

Within the UK Mission to the UN we are contributing to that and becoming a “greener” and more environmentally-friendly place to work. Pursuing greening initiatives helps us not only contribute to reducing the Government’s overall carbon footprint, but also to save money (a very important task these days) through greater energy efficiency and less waste. Our targets are a part of our year long change plan, so are shorter in timescale than the governments overall goals. Over the course of a year we aim to:

- reduce our carbon footprint by 5%;
- reduce our paper usage by 10%;
- reduce overall refuse by 10%; and

- increase the number of staff walking and cycling to work by 10%.

A cross mission “Green team” was established to ensure we meet our targets. We use two primary methods, first a combination of information sharing and awareness-raising amongst our staff and their families. Second, corporate initiatives which embed environmental considerations in how we work, and what products and services we procure.

Turning to the first method, awareness raising activities:

- We hold an annual “Green Day”, where the Green Team gives informal presentations and quizzes, creates informative displays and provides tips for greener living in the office and at home;
- Every Thursday during our Mission Corporate meeting we deliver a weekly “green tip”. For example turning down the heating in your house, drinking tap water rather than bottled, taking your own toiletries to hotels, shortening your shower, reusing envelopes.
- We provide staff with information on how much energy they were using at home and encouraging conservation where possible.
- We encourage energy saving in the office (turning off electronics/lights when not in use, etc.)
- We also have a “Green Message Board” where staff can post and receive information on green best practices, including the most environmentally friendly restaurants in New York and ideas for Christmas shopping.

On the second method, corporate initiatives we have undertaken include:

- Including green considerations in our Estates Strategy, including more energy efficient appliances in residences; reusing existing furniture stocks, sometimes for up to 12 years.
- Providing a space for staff to recycle batteries and stamps, and holding used clothing drives
- Working with our building administration to ensure proper recycling practices (UKMIS purchased our own recycling bins to ensure proper sorting) and better access for bikers
- Promoting “quick fixes” such as setting printers to print double-sided automatically and setting copy machines to “energy saver” when not in use

- Reducing the amount of hard copy newspapers delivered to the mission
- Purchasing recycled stationery products whenever possible
- Favouring video conferencing over international flights where possible

The UK Mission is not the only part of our diplomatic network that is working to reduce our carbon. Each post is taking different action, dependent on their location, climate and other factors.

- In Nairobi we shared our green strategy and top tips with colleagues in UNEP and five other missions
- In Guatemala we have installed solar water heaters in the Embassy, and indeed we have renewable solar energy powering a number of our embassies around the world.
- In Phnom Penh we run our fleet vehicle on bio-diesel derived from used cooking oil.
- In Stockholm our staff uses Embassy bikes, instead of cars, to travel to official meetings.
- In London real time reporting of energy use has been implemented across central government headquarter buildings to ensure greater public transparency.

All of this has made a significant difference. In the first twelve months of this government central government offices cut carbon by almost 14%. That's well over 200 million kilowatt hours, [or enough CO₂ to fill 500,000 double-decker buses].

But we still need to find more ways to be green if we are to meet the target to greenhouse gas emissions by 25% by 2015. I would be interested to hear what activities and actions have worked for others, both here in New York and further afield.