

Doing a first class job for UK business under very difficult circumstances

Having its funding from DEFRA cut by around a half is a challenge for any organisation. When the recipient is focussed on helping businesses to use raw materials, water and energy more effectively, and cutting down on waste whenever possible, questions must inevitably be asked about the ability of that organisation to sustain the momentum it has developed.

Envirowise is a government-funded programme which can demonstrate that it has saved UK businesses at least £1 billion in costs since its inception in 1994. The Informed Executive assessed the organisation earlier this year when it first looked at how business could reduce its energy costs.

The view at the time was that it was on the right tracks, helping UK executives adapt their methods of working to reduce carbon emissions at every stage from product design through to packaging.

Enter the Rippleffect

An active campaigner for the business community to make more efficient use of water, Envirowise ran its Big Splash campaign successfully from 2004 until June 2008 when it launched a new scheme – the Rippleffect - to

The Envirowise programme has saved UK businesses an estimated £1 billion + since it was set up almost 15 years ago. It seems set to continue that excellent work, despite experiencing a severe cutback in its DEFRA funding



continue with that good work. But with such a large cut in its finances, it has to be asked whether the organisation has the wherewithal to fund this campaign effectively.

The services and advice of Envirowise are available to every UK business. The organisation specifically does not seek out clients in the public sector but, as we noted last time round, it is permitted to help supply chains which support those institutions.

More than 5,000 site visits

Between its launch and the start of the current government funding cycle in April 2008, Envirowise had undertaken in excess of 5,000 site visits under its FastTrack scheme. These were essentially to larger-scale businesses with dedicated environmental managers or staff with expertise in the field.

The services and advice of Envirowise are available to UK businesses. It does not seek out clients in the public sector but can help supply chains which support those institutions.

Site visits for Envirowise clients are a thing of the past, unless of course, your company is based in Scotland or Wales, where the practice continues. The focus of the new service - Rippleffect - is on Internet-based services supported by telephone contact and a network of regional workshops now being planned.



The view of Envirowise was that this scale of enterprise was perhaps better placed to implement the recommendations that its advisers made, and realise a more immediate benefit as a result. The classic SME sector had access to telephone support and advice, with additional material available from the organisation's web site.

Under the Rippleffect, there will be no scope for visits to companies in England. As Envirowise draws its funds from the Scottish and Welsh administrations for services delivered in those two countries, visits to companies there will continue,

The withdrawal of visits in England must be seen as a consequence of the financial cutbacks. They were clearly considered to have been effective as they have not been withdrawn in the parts of the UK where funding is still available.

First approach over the Internet

The Rippleffect contrasts with the Big Splash in that advice, training and information for

“We are targetting people who have never considered the implications of water consumption before. There is certainly no technical knowledge required or an understanding of what is involved in water efficiency. We take all participants through the course from scratch. Guidance delivered online will be based on detailed assumptions and its own analyses of practice over the years.”

companies based in England are all to be delivered in the first instance over the Internet. This is to be complemented by telephone support, as in the past, while a series of regional workshops now being planned will provide more in-depth contact between Envirowise and the companies it is seeking to assist.

Claire Sweeney, the Envirowise Water Manager, explained that companies wishing to participate will first sign up online before 10 September to register for the first six-month training programme. “Once the scheme is fully in place, those companies will access pages exclusive to them and draw down guidance that will help them reduce water consumption.”

The online course will cover such topics as how to construct a water balance, why there is a case for improving water efficiency, the options for sourcing water for use in business, and ways to save resources by re-using water and recycling effluent.

Regional workshops planned

Once those registering for the programme have signed up, Envirowise will have a better understanding of the geographical spread of these companies, and will organise a series of tailored workshops in locations nearest to the participants.

Claire Sweeney identified the purpose of those sessions as threefold; to help companies collect data; for them to develop an action plan for reducing water waste, and to implement the action plan.

Did she believe that staff at most of the companies which would enrol would have sufficient technical sophistication to work through the stages? “We are targetting people who have never considered the implications of water consumption before.

“There is certainly no technical knowledge required or an understanding of what is involved in water efficiency. We take all participants through the course from scratch. Guidance delivered online will be based on

There is so much to commend the scheme that the ability to reach the right audience in time for the 10 September deadline is paramount to its success. That Envirowise is operating under restricted budgets should be no reason for the Rippleffect failing to take off and achieving results.

detailed assumptions and its own analyses of practice over the years.”

How water usage can be improved will clearly depend on the sector involved, so the Envirowise team must be ready to handle a very broad array of training requirements. Major food companies are already involved in an adventurous sector initiative involving Envirowise and the Food & Drink Federation – the Federation House Commitment as it is known.

Launched in March 2008, that programme has so far signed up 30 of the largest manufacturers in that sector: all have committed to cut water consumption by 20% by the year 2020.

Amongst the other sectors where Claire Sweeney and her colleagues see the scheme offering real benefits are in the chemical sector, metal working and mineral extraction. “A sector where there is a great deal of water wastage is hotels, restaurants and, indeed, the leisure sector generally.

“These organisations tend to be large users of water but because of their widespread dispersion across the country, it is difficult to target them with individual training. We hope that many of these organisations will sign up for the scheme. The workshops will be an opportunity to address the issues they have worked through online beforehand.”

Quantifying consumption

As the Rippleffect sets out to reduce each participating company's use of water, the ability to quantify consumption at the start of the programme and then after the online training and workshop, will play an important part in the new Envirowise campaign.

Conventional meter readings provide a broad brush assessment, but there will be scope for companies to undertake more detailed and comprehensive assessments of water usage.

The depth to which executives take this analysis will clearly depend on the quantities of water involved, its cost (which varies from region to region around the UK) and the potential for reduction. Sweeney again: We want companies to draw up a water balance which

sets out their water ‘assets and liabilities’ so that management can get a better understanding of their water sources and routes for dispersal. No less important is the construction of a flow map – analogous to a company's P&L for water – which will identify the major uses of water in their organisation.”

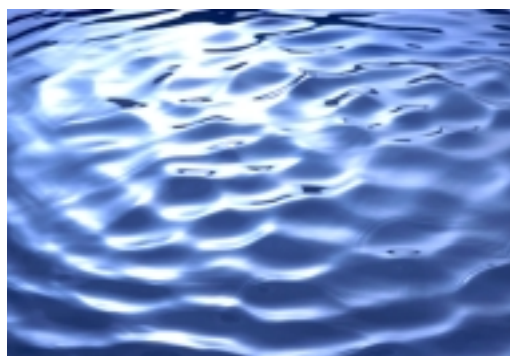
No upper limit to participants

As an online training programme, the new Rippleffect should have no upper limit to the number of participants: in theory at least, all the readers of *The Informed Executive* could take their companies into the scheme. Within sensible bounds, that would be possible: Envirowise has to co-ordinate activities at each stage of the programme, produce course notes on web pages and liaise with all the participants to keep them informed.

Marketing of the new Envirowise campaign is apparently through press releases, adverts in trade journals, its specialist sector contacts in sectors and the web site itself.

There is so much to commend the scheme that the ability to reach the right audience in time for the 10 September deadline is paramount to its success.

That Envirowise is operating under restricted budgets should be no reason for the Rippleffect failing to take off and achieving results. It is only to be hoped that by replacing a ‘big splash’ with a ‘ripple’ there is no subliminal message that the new scheme has a lower key priority. §



The Rippleffect is open to businesses of any size in England. The deadline for joining the six-month initiative is 10 September, 2008.

Anyone interested in signing up for the free initiative can call the Envirowise Advice Line on 0800 585794 or visit: www.envirowise.gov.uk/rippleffect