

# Brahma Kumaris Environmental Commitment

## A wider view

The Brahma Kumaris Environmental Policy aims to encourage all of us throughout the organisation to feel that we are guardians of the Earth's resources.

We can help each other to grow in terms of our awareness of the natural world as a living system that needs our care; and deepen our concern for cultures living in environmentally susceptible lands. By becoming more mindful of these issues and more compassionate in our attitudes we can make environmental choices that can be felt in all spheres of our lives – in our homes and personal life as well as in Brahma Kumaris activities and buildings. We will use all resources in a more mindful and sustainable way.

The five main attitudes that will empower our environmental approach are:

- 1. Living with Simplicity**– this is already part of our BK culture, but no harm having the aim to improve where we can. With an eye to the impact that all purchases have on Mother Earth, let's ask ourselves for the Earth's sake as well for the sake of economy, before we buy anything 'Is this purchase really necessary for centre maintenance and activities?'
- 2. Buying Compassionately** – where purchases are necessary, and local budgets allow, environmentally friendly choices are sought out and considered.
- 3. Using Economically** – using resources carefully, from a place of respect and gratitude for the people who produced them and the resources that were used to create them.
- 4. Learning Continuously** - always learning from each other and especially learning from other organisations we work with, many of whom may have more experience of using Environmental practices than we do.
- 5. Sharing Generously** - sharing information via the BK environmental website - so that we can spread best environmental practices within the organisation and beyond. The environmental website is a good place to start for advice – please post up your experience or knowledge of products to consider for good environmental features. Sharing what we already know is the best place to start.

For more details: [www.environment.brahmakumaris.org](http://www.environment.brahmakumaris.org)

## The specifics – for BK Centres

### Phase I - Where we are now + a small step forward

The actual policy is primarily aimed at those who run BK centres, so that we can move forward as an organisation bringing a greater environmental awareness into the way we work and live.

We have a great place to start from. It's already part of BK culture to use resources wisely and avoid waste. So our first step is to recognise the good practices we already use in BK centres and see if we can move forward a step. Most centres will be able to tick most things on the list of Phase I already, which will be an encouraging start

The 3Rs are the main principles that are widely adopted by many organisations as the basis for their environmental policies, and we would like to use them throughout our organisation

Reducing Re-using Recycling

Out of the three R's – 'Reducing' is the most powerful brake with the greatest potential to reduce emissions - followed by 'Re-using' and finally 're-cycling'.

Some of the following examples might not be presently possible for some centres e.g. an existing printer or copier might not be able to do double-sided printing. There is no suggestion of buying new equipment for this purpose - but where equipment needs to be replaced anyway because it can't be fixed, please think about environmental features when making your choice –The most important thing is to be open to new options that may reduce environmental impact while honouring your own budgets.

**3R's - 1.1 Reducing** waste and buying only what is necessary in all that we do – catering, office, transport, cleaning, heating.

Catering: keeping catering waste to a minimum through good communication about numbers attending programmes, reducing the use of disposable plates, cups etc where possible.

Office: Reviewing which internal documents and external publications are essential, with the aim of reducing waste and saving money. For example, where possible our printing and photocopying can be on double-sided paper; reducing the margins on paper to cut down the number of document pages.

Transport: Promoting a mindful approach to transport, combining journeys and cutting down on non-essential journeys. Follow this order of preference: foot, bike, public transport, car, plane. For journeys that require the use of a car, car sharing is already used widely – let's see if we can take it further.

Heat and Light: Have a look at new ways to cut down on energy use in all we do. For example lights and equipment switched on only when needed, and not left on stand-by unnecessarily. Progressively replacing light bulbs by energy savers where practical. Look at simple ways to cut down on heating bills e.g. reducing the thermostat by a few degrees.

Cleaning: review the use of cleaning materials and consider buying or making environmentally friendly products – home made options can work really well – see environmental blog for suggestions.

**3R's - 1.2 Re-use** wherever possible by trying to find a second life for items especially paper and office stationery. Consider using scrap paper in printers, fax machines, for taking messages and for writing notes or draft copies of documents. Look at re-using envelopes and packaging where possible. The same approach might be taken for furniture.

**3R's - 1.3 Recycle** as the least preferred option of the 3Rs – because it's the least efficient way to reduce energy/ resource usage - since recycling involves further input of energy and resources in the recycling process. The facilities for recycling vary between nations and towns – find out what recycling facilities are available near you.

These are items that are typically recycled: paper, glass, natural waste, plastic, tin, aluminium, electrical goods, clothing, shoes, wood – there may be other things you can recycle depending on your local facilities.

You may have a company locally that refills toner cartridges and inkjets. Or a free cycle-type scheme where you can advertise unwanted items for others to use freely. For example where office furniture or IT equipment is being replaced then consider having those items reused or recycled. Unwanted equipment and consumables can be offered to other BK centres locally or other charities you may know or work with.

Buying recycled: Consider the option to switch publications and general office papers to low chlorine, FSC or recycled papers. When purchasing other items of office equipment, consider recycled options.

## **Phase II - For the Environmental leaders among us – who can help us stretch a little**

There are already environmental leaders among us – working on a grand and modest scale.

Let's give BK Centres a chance to volunteer themselves to move onto a higher level of environmental practice as part of a pilot group – lasting for perhaps a 6 months trial and keeping us informed via the blog. This way the centres who are inspired to be a little adventurous can be the guinea pigs for how we can move forward as an organisation onto the next level. We can find out what works where and invite a stream of good ideas that have been tried and tested - and discover the ones that aren't so good!

From understanding how the pilot groups fared over the next 6 months – and giving us all that information to learn from – a Phase II can be proposed – taking us to the next 12 month period.

Here are a few examples, as a starting point:-

### **2.1. Purchase environmentally sound goods.**

- Sourcing of food and refreshments from local suppliers to reduce food miles (preferably within the social economy).
- Printing leaflets and other publications on 'environmentally kind' stock with environmentally friendly inks
- Organic options considered or at least lower pesticide brands and producers (for example UK Co-op fruit and vegetable or Tesco's 'Nurture' brand or local suppliers that reduce pesticides voluntarily).
- Fruit and vegetables chosen in season.
- Fair-trade tea, coffee etc options considered.

### **2.2 Ethical Utility Companies:** Bank account, energy supplier and phone contract with ethical companies.

**2.3 Energy reduction products installed:** insulation, reflective backing for radiators, water hippo bags to reduce the toilet flush, double-glazing, insulation curtains etc. This list can be added to by centres who have tried them out. Where a new BK facility is being built or renovated, consider features that reduce energy consumption.

**2.4 Renewable energy technologies installed.** This could be solar water heating, ground pumps, wind turbines, PV electricity and so on. There are examples of all these being currently used in various BK buildings, bearing in mind local conditions.

**Phase III - Everyone, from all levels in our organisation should have the chance to contribute to this policy via the BK environmental blog.**

This will provide the direction for our Environmental Policy: where we would like to be as organisations re our environmental practices in say 2-5 years time.

It might be that a voice emerges that says lets keep our aims modest - or there might be exciting and fresh ideas for an even more spiritual approach to our Environmental Policy.

October 2012