



Our approach to eco-efficiency

We are committed to doing more with less – a concept known as eco-efficiency.

Managing eco-efficiency

We aim to improve the environmental efficiency of our manufacturing operations, products and services – to produce the same product with less energy, fewer materials and less waste. We have the necessary management systems and tools to achieve this.

We use a set of seven key environmental performance parameters to help us monitor our manufacturing performance and drive future improvements:

- Chemical oxygen demand (COD) – (kg/tonne)
- Hazardous waste – (kg/tonne)
- Non-hazardous waste – (kg/tonne)
- Water – (m³/tonne)
- Energy – (GJ/tonne)
- CO₂ from energy – (kg/tonne)
- Boiler/Utilities sulphur oxides (SO_x) – (kg/tonne)

Despite the changes each year in production tonnages, we can judge how we are doing by measuring performance per unit of output. We have made considerable progress in reducing the environmental impact of our manufacturing sites (see the Eco-efficiency section of our Sustainable Development Report).

For more information on our environmental performance parameters, please see Data parameters (available as a download from the Eco-efficiency section of our Sustainable Development Report).

Targets

Target setting provides a key driver to achieve environmental improvement and cost savings.

As part of our annual environmental reporting process, each site is required to set improvement targets for our key environmental performance parameters. Action plans are put in place at site level and the data is reviewed monthly or quarterly.

Sites are encouraged to set stretching targets through a process of review with the regions and the Safety and Environmental Assurance Centre (SEAC). In each case, targets proposed by the site are reviewed by the regional environmental performance reporting (EPR) manager, supported by training and guidance from SEAC.

A web-based reporting tool enables the regions to easily assess, for example, the progress of individual sites against targets, and the contribution of each site to the total regional load. This allows the identification of key sites where stretch targets are particularly important. Through dialogue with the sites and the regions, the targets are agreed in each case by taking into account any changes that may have occurred at the site during the previous year (for example production portfolio, effluent treatment systems).





The validated Environment Performance Reports are sent by the regions to SEAC which reviews targets for each site. In some cases, through dialogue with the regions' EPR managers, this results in more stretching targets being set by the site.

The individual site targets are aggregated to provide an overall target for each region and for Unilever as a whole.

Improving performance

The annual environment data collection process helps the regions to benchmark and compare performance at their manufacturing sites. For example, the Europe Foods business and Latin America region have carried out studies to identify the underlying differences in data from their factories and examples of good practice. Please see the Environmental strategy & management section of our Sustainable Development Report for more information on how we share good practice.

In 2003, we launched a unique project, Project Medusa, with the challenge to reduce our water consumption in our Latin American Foods manufacturing operations. Project Medusa was launched at a special workshop held in Goiania, Brazil, which included the eco-efficiency training course. Site delegates were given examples of good environmental practices throughout our operations to help reduce water consumption at sites. Delegates also presented their own initiatives to help reduce water use and were asked to assess the suitability of the projects for implementation at other sites.

Medusa ended in early 2006. Between 2003 and 2005 the Latin America Region reduced total water consumption of 7.9%, and load per tonne of production by 4.7%. In 2006 Unilever won the Premier Business Commitment to the Environment (BCE) Award for International Collaboration for the Medusa project.

The principles behind Medusa are now being implemented in other parts of Unilever to reduce energy and waste. For example, the Triple R (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) Project in Africa, Middle East and Asia used this approach to achieve a 27.5 % reduction in total waste per tonne of production over a two year period – narrowly missing the 30% target. Sites collaborated to share best practice and set targets to reduce waste levels and disposal costs. Due to the limited recycling infrastructure in the region, alternative ways of reusing the waste were developed. For example, spent bleaching earth is used by local brick companies as fuel for kilns and as a filler for bricks, and some waste is composted and given to local farmers as soil nutrients.

