

Get green, save green

Being proactive is the way to go when it comes to environmental policy

INTERVIEWED BY MARK SCOTT

Environmental compliance may not always be a top priority for business owners, but fail to secure the required permits and adhere to the regulations that apply to your company and it could quickly catch up to you.

"I have seen instances where the agency proposed penalties that were so high, payment would put companies out of business," says Meagan L. Moore, partner, Environmental Practice Group, Brouse McDowell.

"There is also the risk that a certain stigma would attach to your company if an environmental agency comes in and realizes you are not in compliance and haven't been for some time. The agency might consider your operation more stringently than others because you now have this reputation of not giving proper consideration to environmental regulations."

Fortunately, there are solutions to avoid these dire consequences.

Smart Business spoke with Moore about what business owners can do to stay on the right side of environmental law.

Where do companies miss on environmental compliance?

Often, things that you don't typically consider can become problems. If you're doing an expansion or you are building on your property, you might not consider the need to get a storm water permit for your construction activities.


You also may not be aware of universal waste regulations and the specific ways to store and dispose of fluorescent light bulbs.

These might seem like little things, but if an agency came out for an inspection and detected them, they would cite you and seek a penalty.

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One of the biggest trouble spots is not looking into whether you have obtained the necessary permits, licenses and registrations for your operations. The permitting process can take time as some environmental permits are written for specific sources.

Getting the proper permit might take a few months and you often need more than one permit.

The first thing you should do to get in compliance is see if what you are doing has any impact on the environment.

If you're a new business or you're buying property to add on to your operations, look into past uses for the property. Determine if an environmental site assessment has been performed or if there are any zoning issues.

If you're in an industry that makes some sort of product, are there uncontrolled air emissions?

Are boilers, generators or fuel consumption equipment being used? If so, these items may need to be registered. Water and waste are two areas that present a number of complex issues in terms of sourcing and disposal that require attention.

Even non-hazardous waste has certain regulations that need to be followed in regard to how that waste is going to be disposed.

What type of assistance is available to conduct an environmental evaluation?

One option to help with this process is to reach out to an environmental consultant or environmental attorney, but this is not always financially feasible. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency offers the Small Business Assistance Program for companies with fewer than 100 employees to help identify environmental compliance issues you could encounter.

It's a free, non-regulatory program where the agency will send someone to your business to do an on-site environmental inspection. The program is entirely confidential. During the inspection, the agency will compile a list of compliance issues that exist, offer guidance and, if necessary, work with you through the process of getting a permit.

What cost benefits can be realized through environmental compliance?

Smart management of environmental issues not only reduces regulatory risk, but also helps the business become more efficient. It can reduce operating costs and improve profitability. Consider saving money and protecting your business from potential enforcement by going beyond mere compliance. Take into consideration what you can do today and it will save you money in the long run. ●