

RESEARCH REVEALS ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY PAYS

September 2008: Over half of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) do not believe that good environmental practice can lead to reduced operating costs¹. However, a Government survey² has found that collectively, small businesses in the UK are saving at least £58 million a year by using a free online service, helping them gain a better understanding of environmental law and in turn giving them an edge over their competition.

The independent survey commissioned by NetRegs.gov.uk, a free website providing guidance on environmental law, found that businesses in the hotel and restaurant industry who use this government-backed service and sign up for regular e-alerts are saving at least £4,842 a year².

Businesses using NetRegs.gov.uk made these savings from more efficient handling of their waste and through financial savings on consultant fees and time researching legislation, as well as avoiding fines that they would have incurred through non-compliance.

Last year poor awareness of environmental law among SMEs led to them being hit by fines of around £2.4 million for pollution and environmental damage³. Even today more than three quarters of businesses (78 per cent) are unable to name just one piece of environmental law that applies to their industry¹, a figure that reinforces the importance for businesses of taking advantage of the free guidance provided by NetRegs.

¹ Research conducted by Opinion Matters/Tickbox.net Sept 2008

² Survey conducted by economics for the environment consultancy (eftec) March 2008

³ Environment Agency Spotlight Report 2007

Kitley House Hotel is one example of the many businesses in the hotel and restaurant industry which has benefitted financially from making positive changes to reduce its impact on the environment. Andrew Huckerby, General Manager, comments: "Making environmental changes has saved us £13,000 a year – it makes good business sense. Our green credentials are also popular with our customers who appreciate the steps we take to be environmentally friendly. I'm in favour of any new services which give small businesses a competitive edge!"

John Holbrow, Chairman of the Environment and Energy Policy Unit at the Federation of Small Businesses said: "Environmental awareness should be a top priority for small businesses to help them not only to save costs but also to improve their competitive edge. The NetRegs website is an extremely useful resource that provides easy-to-digest information on environmental law that is not only comprehensive, but uniquely relevant to small business needs. It also offers an added strength in their valuable, free e-alert service that enables businesses to keep up-to-date with the latest legislation."

Martin Brocklehurst, Head of External Programmes at the Environment Agency, comments: "We know small and medium-sized businesses within the hotel and restaurant industry struggle to keep on top of environmental regulations, but in such a challenging financial climate it is more important than ever that they take advantage of the potential savings of going green."

He adds, "This research dispels the assumption that environmental compliance often comes with an added cost. With free, plain English guidance, NetRegs can show how compliance can make businesses more economical and competitive, and we urge all UK SMEs to sign up to NetRegs to keep on top of environmental law."

- Ends -

Notes to editors:

- NetRegs commissioned *economics for the environment consultancy* (eftec) to undertake an independent assessment of how much Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are saving through improving their awareness of environmental legislation.
- The Economic Evaluation of the Benefits of NetRegs to Small and Medium Enterprise Users in the UK survey was carried out with 465 SMEs in March 2008.

- The research involved NetRegs user data, telephone interviews and an email questionnaire to 5,000 e-alert subscribers, analysing resource and financial savings per year.

Further findings from the Opinions Matter/Tickbox.net survey include:

- 32 per cent of SMEs do not have any environmental policies or systems in place, and are unlikely to develop them in the future
- 33 per cent of SMEs are generally concerned about their environmental impact
- A third of SMEs have addressed their environmental impact to reduce costs

About NetRegs:

- NetRegs - www.netregs.gov.uk - is a joint initiative between the Environment Agency in England and Wales (EA and EAW), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).
- NetRegs was launched in 2004 to provide SMEs with guidance on complying with environmental legislation.
- The website currently offers specific guidelines for 112 industry sectors in the UK.
- NetRegs provides free guidance to SMEs in the UK, which is available without the need to register.

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