

Environmental Responsibility Charter for Public Research Institutes

Preamble

After decades of scientific research, the link between human activities, climate change, and degradation of the biosphere is now clearly established and widely documented. Our best scientific models show that there is a high risk that the situation will become irreversible in many socio-ecosystems — possibly in the short term — if we continue on our current trajectory of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions.

Objectives

The management of research institutes that are signatories to this charter recognise the reality and the importance of this environmental emergency. They demonstrate their willingness to implement changes to their institutional practices that will significantly reduce the environmental impact of their research activities. They undertake to disseminate this charter to their staff, institutional partners and members of the public, and to promote its rapid and effective application across all of their activities, both internal and external, with particular emphasis on the eight primary commitments outlined below.

The Eight Commitments

Signatory institutes undertake to:

Laboratory management

- take the environmental footprint of activities into account in the management of their institute, ensure that the projects and teams within their research unit integrate environmental responsibility into the management of their activities,
- create a commission dedicated to environmental responsibility that will identify and help to implement strategies to reduce the environmental footprint of the research unit's activities,
- ensure that the aforementioned commission has sufficient resources to achieve its purpose and that the commission is represented on the institute's decision-making committees.

Environmental footprint assessment

- carry out a thorough assessment of the environmental footprint of the research unit. This includes a program to raise awareness amongst institute staff about climate issues, a complete assessment of greenhouse gas emissions (including emissions related to institute premises, business travel, working from home, high-performance and office computing, institute purchases etc.), and an assessment of the waste production and resource consumption (water, energy, refrigerants) by the institute.
- publish a report on the research unit's environmental footprint assessment and communicate it widely to staff,
- based on the environmental footprint assessment, define and implement a proactive policy with quantitative annual milestones for reducing the environmental footprint
- promote the effective implementation of the policy within the research unit by awareness-raising and staff-training about the major elements of the research unit's environmental footprint (e.g. business travel, food, computing, etc.), and monitor it.

Work Environment

- ensure that the working conditions of staff guarantee a healthy environment that is adapted to their role and that effectively reduces the environmental footprint of their activities,
- promote a policy of diversity and equity among staff, and on the research unit's governance bodies, in order to ensure a nuanced and inclusive awareness of environmental issues,
- ensure that meals provided by collective catering services are eco-responsible, in particular by using ingredients with a low environmental impact, by favouring local suppliers, by avoiding the use of disposable cutlery and containers, and by limiting packaging.

Environmental footprint reduction

- commit to controlling energy consumption, in particular through: (a) regulation of heating and cooling of institute premises; (b) regulation of water consumption, e.g. by installing flow regulators and promoting eco-friendly individual actions; (c) renovation of buildings to improve their energy efficiency in partnership with relevant supervisory bodies and public authorities; and (d) promoting the transition to renewable energies whenever possible.
- promote the use of eco-friendly transport solutions and carpooling for staff commuting, in particular by installing facilities that facilitate these choices (e.g. secure bicycle garage, communication tools) and by communicating about relevant local initiatives (e.g. University schemes to subsidise staff commuting by public transport, bicycle, carpool etc.)
- facilitate working from home and ensure that it is well-integrated into institutional practice, in particular by ensuring that staff working from home remain active participants in institute activities (e.g. inclusive organisation of collective events).

Business travel

- encourage staff to reduce business travel, especially long-distance air travel.
- provide the necessary administrative support to enable eco-friendly transport options for business travel and provide incentives to staff for choosing them, particularly in terms of using the train rather than the plane when possible,
- provide staff with high quality videoconferencing tools, ensure effective technical support and staff-training in the use of these tools, and encourage their use for short meetings (day or half day),
- offer and encourage car-pooling for business trips over short- and medium-distances

Waste reduction and management

- prohibit the use of disposable catering items (plates, cutlery, cups, etc.) for institute-organised events (seminars, coffee-breaks, buffet lunches) including by external catering services
- limit paper consumption by strongly encouraging staff to reduce printing and photocopying, training staff about eco-responsible strategies for their essential printing and photocopying, and dematerializing administrative procedures whenever possible
- regulate the consumption of equipment by the institute, particularly IT equipment, by encouraging the purchase of equipment with proven longevity, increasing the time period between equipment renewal, and more generally facilitating and promoting the reuse and repair of instruments and equipment in the research unit before proceeding with new purchases,
- work towards the implementation of selective treatment for all institute waste and act in partnership with relevant local actors and supervisory bodies to make this a reality.

Internal communication

- communicate about the environmental footprint of institute activities to all staff, and encourage them to make a collective and individual effort to reduce it,
- promote current initiatives to reduce the institute's environmental footprint, and provide information to staff about the means and tools available to reduce the environmental footprint of research
- define and publish an environmental responsibility charter that staff can read and which they can choose to sign.

External communication

- work in partnership with other laboratories, local actors and institutional partners to reduce the environmental footprint of research,
- when the commitments described in this charter are impossible to implement due to lack of resources or existing regulation, work with relevant institutional partners and regulatory bodies in coordination with other research units to remove these barriers to the charter's implementation,
- encourage independent initiatives by staff members to inform different audiences (general public, students, etc.) about the environmental footprint of human activities