Reducing Emissions from Data and IT Equipment & Services

GHG emissions category

Scope 3, Category 1: Purchased Goods and services

Introduction

This guide walks you through the steps needed to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from your IT and data equipment, including devices like phones, computers, servers, and printers that are often found in offices.

The scale of emissions from your IT and data services can vary based on the nature of your business. For service-based companies, these emissions might form a large part of your total emissions. For manufacturing companies, while it might not be as significant in comparison, it remains crucial to address.

Many solutions exist to cut down greenhouse gas emissions from IT and data services. Not only are they quick and easy to implement, but they also offer other benefits like cost savings and waste reduction. These solutions involve choosing suppliers who are committed to keeping climate change below 1.5 degrees, extending the lifespan of your products, buying refurbished equipment, and lowering the power consumption of your products.

Measure and Understand

Your IT equipment contributes to both your Scope 2 and Scope 3 emissions. Scope 2 emissions are produced from the electricity your equipment uses during operation, while Scope 3 emissions stem from the production and disposal of equipment. There are also indirect emissions that come from data transfer and storage through your equipment.

To determine the emissions from the IT equipment you buy, see if your supplier discloses the emissions related to the production of the equipment. This information can help you evaluate and compare different options. If your suppliers cannot provide emissions data, you can use substitute data to estimate your emissions, and consider switching to a supplier who reports emissions for each product.

While it's important to collect data on your current emissions, don't let the absence of data stop you from taking action. You can immediately implement the actions below, regardless of whether you have data or not, and these will always help in reducing emissions.

Key Actions

Make Sure Your Suppliers are Committed to the 1.5°C Goal

When you're buying equipment or services, make sure your supplier is committed to the 1.5 °C goal. This means that they need to have set a target to cut their emissions in half by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050, and they're actively working towards these targets.

A sign of this commitment could be membership in the UN-backed Race to Zero campaign through recognized initiatives like the SME Climate Hub, the Exponential Roadmap Initiative, or the Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi).

You can also follow guidelines for purchasing sustainable IT equipment and services, examples of which can be found here.

Repair, Don't Replace.

The most effective way to minimise emissions from your devices is to use them for as long as possible. Whenever possible, repair broken equipment instead of buying new.

Consider Refurbished Devices.

Purchasing refurbished IT equipment can cut emissions by up to 90% compared to buying new equipment, and it can also save you money.

Recycle and Reuse Your Devices.

If a product isn't being used, try to find it a new home, return it to the supplier, resell it, or recycle it. If it's no longer functional, make sure it gets repaired, refurbished or recycled. Recycling your IT equipment is also key to reducing e-waste, which is a growing problem.

Select Products with Low Carbon Footprint

Opt for devices that have the lowest environmental footprint. Identifying which product has the lowest emissions can be challenging. Search for products where the carbon footprint is reported and that has relevant certifications. Different regions will have their own certifications and standards, so it's essential to research the relevant ones for your location.

Choose Long-Lasting Devices.

If you can't purchase refurbished devices, purchase devices that are built to last and can be easily repaired and recycled. Choose suppliers that offer a take-back process for their products.

Minimise Power Consumption.

Choose products that use less electricity (for example, a laptop uses 90% less electricity than a desktop computer) and switch to renewable electricity.

Cost Implications

The actions described in this guide require no initial investment cost and will result in immediate and long term cost reductions.

Engage with Employees

When talking with your employees about your office equipment, explain how your goal to lessen the environmental impact of your IT equipment ties into your company's broader sustainability and climate goals. This will help them understand why you're taking these actions and will lead to their support and ideas for further improvements.

An additional way to involve your employees is to run a campaign to collect unused IT equipment from the office for recycling. This won't just result in a significant amount of e-waste being recycled, but it will also emphasise the importance of recycling and reducing your company's carbon footprint from IT equipment.