

WASH Pledge for Access to Safe WASH at the Workplace

Frequently asked questions

The WASH Pledge and the WBCSD

1. Does my company need to be a member of the WBCSD to sign the WASH Pledge?

No – the members of the WBCSD are providing leadership but the opportunity is open to any company to sign the Pledge. This also includes Small and Medium Enterprises.

2. How does the Pledge fit into the overall WBCSD strategy?

The Pledge is part of the Action2020 framework, a business sustainability agenda towards 2020 and beyond, led by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), with water as one of the identified priority areas for urgent action at scale.

More specifically, the Pledge is seen as a direct contribution to the Water priority area Must-Have: “By 2020, water of adequate quality and quantity is shared among all users and is in a more sustainable balance with the limits of renewable water resources and ecosystems requirements”.

Scope & nature of the commitment

3. Does the Pledge include my contractors/suppliers, employees’ homes and communities in which my company operates?

No – the Pledge only encompasses a company’s own operation sites under direct company control. Companies are encouraged to consider their extended value chains, employees’ homes, contractor premises etc. but these are not part of the commitment.

4. Is there a specific description of what adherence to the Pledge principles means in practice?

As outlined in question 16, the WBCSD has developed supporting documentation to provide guidance on how to implement the Pledge’s commitment in practice. These include points of reference on what represents leading practice in providing an appropriate standard for safe WASH in different workplaces – including specific examples of action items.

5. How can my company move beyond Pledge compliance? Does the WBCSD provide special recognition for this?

Companies can go beyond the Pledge’s level of compliance by moving from implementation at a company’s own premises to advocacy across value chains (employee homes and communities, as well as extended supply chains).

The WBCSD ensures that these high-level achievements are highlighted in its related communication at various opportunities (e.g. case studies, general advocacy outreach). The goal is to make a baseline standard that all WBCSD members can demonstrate their compliance to.

6. Are there some reporting requirements?

No – there is no formal reporting requirement. The integration of Pledge points of reference into existing company processes as well as internal & external communication is highly encouraged. Companies are also invited to share their implementation experiences and feedback with the WBCSD. Signatory companies will feature on the WBCSD WASH Pledge page.

7. Does the WBCSD verify adherence to the Pledge points of reference?

No, the WBCSD does not act as an auditor to verify conformity with the Pledge points of reference. Instead, we rely on the good faith of each company to take the necessary measures to achieve compliance once the Pledge is signed. We do expect that Pledge items on safe water, sanitation and hygiene are integrated into existing company auditing processes, and run at an established frequency. We set up regular calls (min. every 6 months) to find out about implementation plans and progress, and offer support if necessary.

8. Is the commitment legally binding?

No - the implementation of the Pledge aims to be integrated into existing company processes rather than responding to an externally imposed requirement.

Rationale for signing

9. What's in there for my company; why should we sign?

The business case is straightforward: investing in safe WASH for employees means a healthier and more productive workforce, as well as expanded and more vibrant markets. Additional business benefits include:

✓ **Demonstrate leadership**

- Join WBCSD members in setting a higher standard for the health and safety of company employees
- Sign the first business-led initiative that directly tackles WASH at the workplace
- Demonstrate that business can have a direct positive impact
- “Walk the talk” by ensuring you are in line with international best practices on WASH

✓ **Generate impact**

- Lead the global business momentum toward the achievement of universal access to safe WASH and contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Human Right to Water & Sanitation.

✓ **Reap the business benefits**

- Invest in a healthier and more productive workforce
- Generate reputational benefits from your adherence to internationally recognized standards and demonstrate them to a wide audience
- Enhance your employees' satisfaction and loyalty
- Strengthen your social license to operate and lower your reputational risks

10. Most of my operations are based in high-income countries where access to safe WASH at the workplace is not an issue, so I don't see what's in there for me. Why would I sign?

Signing the Pledge will lend your company's voice to the business movement around access to safe WASH. It will also ensure your company actively participates to the implementation of the upcoming *Sustainable Development Goals* and the *Human Right to Water and Sanitation*.

Contrary to common belief, some case studies show that access to safe WASH – especially sanitation and hygiene – can still be an issue in high-income countries: Issues identified from company gap assessments in a high-income context include insufficient provision of toilet facilities either for employees, for disabled people, or both. There can also be limited awareness on hygiene.

11. We are already compliant with Pledge requirements – so why should we sign?

As a leader, signing the Pledge provides an opportunity to show your commitment to action towards WBCSD's Vision 2050. It also provides a platform for you to communicate about your good practices, both internally and externally. If you're already compliant, your signature on the Pledge will generate attention to existing company practices in terms of occupational health and safety (H&S). In addition, by signing the Pledge, you will become part of a strong community of recognized leaders in the WASH field. Together, you will add your voices to the global call to action for accelerating universal access to WASH.

Signature process

12. My company is willing to sign; what is the process?

The signature process of the Pledge is straightforward.

Please have someone who is in the position to commit your company to the Pledge send an official email to fedotova@wbcscsd.org. The email must state that he/she confirms that he/she signed the Pledge in the name of your company, and he/she understands this means the company commits to providing appropriate access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene to all employees in all locations under direct company control within three years of signature.

Sample paragraph

This email confirms that [Name of the Company] has committed to signing the 'WBCSD Pledge for Access to Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene at the Workplace'. We recognize that by signing this Pledge, [Name of the Company] commits to implementing access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene at the workplace at an appropriate level of standard for all employees in all premises under our direct control within three years of signing the WASH Pledge.

13. My company is willing to sign; what would be the next steps?

The first step is the signature process (see answer to question 12 for more details). Then the company logo is added to the webpage (<http://www.wbcspd.org/washatworkplace.aspx>), and follow-ups with you are organized to discuss how your company intends to implement the Pledge and communicate about it – individually and together with the WBCSD.

14. My company is a subsidiary of a multi-national corporation. Can we sign the Pledge separately from our global HQs?

Yes – a company’s subsidiary can sign the Pledge separately from its HQ whether the latter is already a Pledge signatory or not.

Implementation process

15. Is there guidance available on Pledge implementation?

The WBCSD Water Program developed a Self-Assessment tool and Guiding Principles to support the Pledge implementation by signatories (available for download at <http://www.wbcspd.org/washatworkplace.aspx>). It also focuses on sharing company experiences to ensure learning and adoption of knowledge to facilitate implementation. The WBCSD team is available via phone or email any time to answer your questions and provide you with additional communication material or any other support as required (contact Sara Traubel at traubel@wbcspd.org). The Self-assessment tool is also available as a web-based version on SurveyMonkey®, generously made available by Unilever, a Pledge signatory.

The [WBCSD Global Water Tool](#) can also be helpful in a first instance in mapping company sites that are located in countries at risk (where the local population has low levels of access to safe WASH) and help prioritize action. However, again, its use is not mandatory.

16. Are the Self-Assessment Tool and the Guiding Principles for Implementation mandatory when my company starts implementing the Pledge?

No – both documents provide guidance on how the Pledge can be implemented, but the implementation procedure remains an internal choice for your company.

The Self-Assessment tool or any other tool that your company decides to use internally must be applied at each site level. This is to verify that all necessary measures are taken to ensure access to safe WASH for all employees at an appropriate level. These include points of reference on what represents leading practice for providing an appropriate standard for safe WASH in different workplaces – including specific examples of action items.

17. How have other companies generally implemented the Pledge?

Different companies approach implementation from different angles, but most often they do so through existing internal Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) guidelines and auditing. We realize that assessing each operation site is an ambitious undertaking (though online survey tools such as SurveyMonkey© are ideal for reaching out to many sites in parallel), and therefore allow companies to run one or several pilots. For

example, companies could examine one country's operations or several key sites before rolling out the Pledge to their entire operations. This helps them maximize efficiency and build on first findings/lessons learned.

18. What if my company has not reached compliance within three years?

In principle, the commitment should be achieved within three years of signature. However, depending on your findings, it is acceptable to extend this timeframe if the full assessments have been run and action plans are put in place.

19. What about elements that my company has partial / no control over, such as sanitary installations in leased buildings, municipal water supply, or externally contracted janitorial staff?

We acknowledge that there are elements related to WASH at the workplace included in the guidance which may be beyond direct control of companies. A number of checks (e.g. regular testing of water supply) included in the guidance are intended to reduce the risk of these external elements. We encourage companies to include elements that touch upon external stakeholders in future contracts with building operators or cleaning staff.

20. What have been some of the gaps identified by companies having completed the gap assessment?

Examples of identified gaps have been insufficient provision of toilets / urinals for certain population groups (e.g. toilets for women / disabled) and insufficient provisions for regular inspection, maintenance and repair of water supply and drainage facilities. Action plan elements have included training for cleaning personnel, awareness raising activities for employees, or "fine-tuning" of systems and review mechanisms.

Learning and sharing of experiences / Communication

21. Once my company has signed the Pledge, what will be the different communication channels available for us to share our implementation journey?

Communication is tailored to each signatory's needs and willingness to communicate. It includes case studies, written and filmed interviews, etc. which are all published on the WBCSD [WASH Pledge webpage along with the logos of signatories.](#)

22. Are there some mechanisms in place allowing for signatories to learn and share their experiences among each other?

Signatories are put in contact with one another via regular group communications. Periodic learning and sharing of experiences are organised through webinars and workshops by the WBCSD secretariat. In addition, the WBCSD can connect new signatories with companies from similar sectors further advanced on their implementation.

23. What have been some emerging themes for collective learning?

- How to drive WASH standards to an international level in cases where national legislation on water and sanitation is weak

- How to raise awareness among your workforce in cultural contexts where there is little knowledge on WASH issues
- How to convince senior management that WASH issues can also be of concern in an emerging / developed market context
- How to implement WASH standards in leased office space and among hired janitorial staff
- What do WASH standards mean in an agricultural / forestry context, or in complex, remote operations such as underground mining sites

Additional themes are being identified alongside progress of Pledge implementation experience among the signatory companies.

Other

24. What are the main reasons preventing other companies from signing?

Some of the challenges experienced by WBCSD members re: the adoption of the Pledge are:

- Concern about additional reporting burden (even though it is important to recall that there is no formal reporting requirement associated with the Pledge!);
- Concern about legal compliance consequences, especially re. the Human Right to Water and Sanitation (even though it is important to recall that the Pledge is non-legally binding);
- Concern about the scope of the commitment, e.g. Pledge implementation across the value chain & in remote worksites (even though it is important to recall that the Pledge commitment only concerns direct operations, that is premises under direct company control);
- Lack of awareness of the existence of the initiative;
- Business value out of it (“I am already doing it so why should I sign?”);
- Finding the right person to talk to within the company – the Pledge being at the edge of environmental (water resource), health & safety, and human rights compliance issues, the department in charge of its implementation may vary from one company to another.

25. How does the WBCSD Pledge relate to other similar initiatives (e.g. CEO Water Mandate, UN processes, etc.)?

The WBCSD Pledge is in line with principles presented by the United Nations and other organizations working in the space of business and access to safe WASH (even though it remains a separate initiative, and the only business-led initiative directly tackling access to safe WASH at the workplace). For instance:

- The **UN CEO Water Mandate** recently published a [white paper making the business case for corporate action on sanitation](#) which references the Pledge as a necessary first step for business engagement, before looking beyond the fence line and engaging with communities.
- The WASH Pledge is referenced in the new publication by the former **UN Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation**, Catarina



de Albuquerque: *Realising the human rights to water and sanitation: A Handbook* ([see Booklet 4, page 29](#)).