



Standards as a pathway to achieve Net Zero

The importance of and urgency around achieving net zero has never been clearer.

Climate change has emerged as one of the biggest challenges of our time. Recent events, such as floods, wildfires, droughts, and hurricanes, provide a stark preview of the increasingly frequent and severe consequences we face.

Simply put, global temperatures matter. It's estimated that nearly three billion people could be exposed to severe climate risk if average global temperatures rise by 2°C above pre-industrial levels. However, if warming can be reduced to 1.5°C or below, then this figure could be halved.

The UK is working to spearhead the charge against global warming, kickstarting the global sustainability effort and being the first major economy to commit to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Of course, for this to come to fruition, the role of businesses will be crucial. However, it can be both daunting and difficult for organizations to know where to begin when starting out on their net zero journeys. Companies can naturally be left feeling overwhelmed or at a loss when it comes to developing sustainability strategies from scratch. What exactly can be done to reduce emissions? Are there any quick wins? Where should businesses focus their energies and investment?

The role of standards in supporting sustainability strategies

Thankfully, standards can play a key role in supporting organizations as they transition towards a more sustainable future. Standards are at the forefront of environmental management, helping businesses save energy, money, and the environment.

In January 2023, former energy minister Chris Skidmore published an Independent Net Zero Review '[Mission Zero](#)', outlining 129 recommendations to meet net zero commitments and maximize the opportunities created by a green economy.

Here, the role of standards in accelerating the adoption of innovation and smoothing the net zero transition was recognized, with standards mentioned over 121 times throughout the 340-page review. Some of the key recommendations from the report include:

- The development of a Net Zero Homes Standard.
- The development of a Net Zero Charter, introducing standardized approaches and ecolabelling.
- Updating standards to align with government policy more closely.

- Updating standards to level the playing field in respect of net zero transition plans, taxonomy, greenwashing, and stewardship.

As a global standards organization and the UK's national standards body, BSI has been recognized in the report for its leadership in developing standards for emerging technologies and its international collaboration on ground-breaking projects aimed at achieving net zero emissions.

Our role in fostering international cooperation was highlighted by the creation and publication of the Net Zero Guidelines at COP27, as well as our work as a partner for the Integrity Council for the Voluntary Carbon Markets in the development of the Core Carbon Principles.

As a purposeful organization, we support and enable businesses transitioning to net zero with the help of standards. We offer a wide variety of standards that provide guidance and best practice in relation to environmental management, circular economy, climate change, decarbonization, and energy and water.

In essence, standards help accelerate the adoption of innovation, provide credibility to green claims, and drive transformational collective action. Standards are an indispensable tool to navigate the net zero landscape.

1. Standards accelerate the adoption of innovation

Standards provide a tried and tested framework in which ideas, initiatives and strategies can be taken from concept to reality. In the case of net zero, they can be used to define essential parameters, outline key goals, and offer guidance for effective transition.

Further, standards can also build trust, de-risk investments, and accelerate the adoption of new technologies. Given that many sustainability strategies necessitate whole

system transitions from businesses, standards can help to bridge the gap between the current state of play and the net zero path ahead. Through technologically agnostic, best practice guidance, standards provide companies with a means of innovating with confidence to become more sustainable and embrace innovative solutions.

As we move towards a low-carbon and climate-resilient society, standards will be vital in guiding organizations as they work to adapt, transform, and communicate their sustainability performance. Further, they will also be vital in helping firms allocate their resources quickly and effectively.

2. Standards provide credibility to green claims

As climate change concerns hold an increasingly bright spotlight, businesses and their sustainability practices have been brought under greater scrutiny.

This includes fielding growing scepticism in relation to 'green' marketing claims. With greenwashing becoming a rampant problem, customers now want to see proof of businesses' commitment to reducing their own emissions and their contribution to shared efforts in tackling the environmental and social challenges of climate change.

Here, standards can help organizations demonstrate their sustainable credentials, and assure customers, employees, and stakeholders of their genuine commitment to sustainability. PAS2060 Carbon Neutrality, for example, provides the framework for entities to ensure their claims of carbon neutrality are credible, transparent, and accurate.

Some of the available standards providing credibility, trust and verification for sustainable credentials include:

- **ISO 14001** - Environmental Management: Demonstrate use of fewer resources, waste cuts, increased recycling, and reduced landfill.

- **ISO 50001** - Energy Management Systems: Reduced energy costs.
- **UK Emissions Trading System Verification (UK ETS)** - Verification of greenhouse gas emissions.
- **PAS 2060** - Carbon Neutrality Standard and Certification: Net zero carbon emissions.

3. Standards drive transformational collective action

Net zero is a global effort that necessitates collective action. Significant governmental and private sector collaboration is needed to increase the impact of all climate programmes, and a standards-based approach provides the mechanism to enable and support a coordinated international response.

Successful collaboration is reliant upon the ability to measure and compare the success of varied approaches, enabling us to use shared experiences to drive innovation and progress forward. Standards act as a universal barometer for performance, and as a reference point for objective comparison and improvement.

At BSI we recognize the criticality of collaboration in relation to net zero. Specifically, we have developed the Sustainability Standards Network – an independent pool of experts volunteering their time and knowledge to ensure British Standards are future-proofed and responsive to evolving industry needs.

Members are drawn mostly from charities, NGOs, public bodies, and social enterprises working across conservation, farming, the market economy, food, fashion, energy, transport, development, and societal sectors, including health, culture, and education. These stakeholders share input with the experts who are developing National and International to ensure NGOs, civil society, and the public interest remain at the forefront of standardization for environmental and sustainability issues.

Standards as a strategic pillar for net zero transition planning

It is promising to see that standards were highlighted as being crucial in accelerating the net zero transition by supporting innovation and collaboration between government and industry within the Independent Net Zero Review 'Mission Zero'.

Embracing sustainability-centric standards is critical to ensure:

- **Compliance:** Demonstrates to external stakeholders that your carbon footprint is transparent, credible, and reliable.
- **Improvement:** Accurate and consistent monitoring and reporting is critical for you to demonstrate improvements over time.
- **Increase sales:** Differentiates you from competitors within your supply chain and supports tendering requirements.
- **Cost savings:** Calculating your carbon footprint helps identify areas for improvement to reduce energy consumption.
- **Manage reputational risk:** Demonstrates that data is reliable and robust enough to withstand media scrutiny.
- **Improve corporate reputation:** Transparency gives confidence to stakeholders.

Moving forward, it is vital that organizations continue to build on the momentum of 'Mission Zero', leveraging standards as a central strategic pillar for net zero transition planning. In doing so, organizations and businesses can implement innovative approaches to accelerate their net zero transitions and contribute to a sustainable future.

Explore more net zero resources...

[The Net Zero Barometer](#)

Our annual research-based report providing small and medium-sized businesses with an in-depth look into the current state of the net zero landscape through the eyes of senior industry leaders and consumers. The 2023 report is helping organizations understand what is required to activate and achieve their Net Zero goal.

[The Little Book of Net Zero](#)

Our straightforward 'how-to' guide to help businesses of all sizes start their journey towards Net Zero.

[The Net Zero Guidelines](#)

The latest document providing a common reference for collective global efforts, understanding, and planning for Net Zero for actors at the state, regional, city and organizational level.

* All resources are free to download.

