The European commercial and audiovisual production industry plays a significant cultural and economic role across the continent. However, production activities can also have a considerable environmental impact, driven by transportation, energy consumption, material use, waste generation, catering services, and travel.

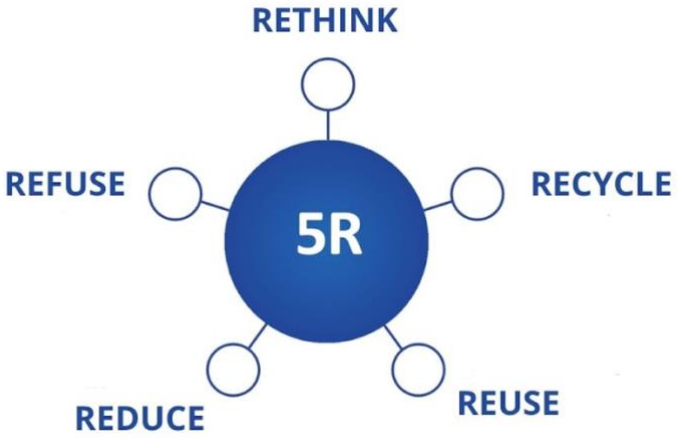
In response to growing environmental awareness, European climate commitments, and evolving international production standards, the EPA is **introducing sustainability frameworks and best-practice guidelines based on documents already developed and published by its member countries**.

The **EPA Sustainable Production Guidelines** brings together the common principles identified across these frameworks into **a single practical and adaptable document** for production companies, clients, agencies producing commercial content, studios, suppliers, and freelance professionals operating across Europe.

The objective is not only to reduce environmental impact but also to **foster healthier, more efficient, and future-focused production systems** that support circular economy principles and **strengthen the long-term resilience of the industry**.

THE 5R PRINCIPLES

These guidelines are based on the 5R principles of sustainable production.



RETHINK How do our production choices affect the environment?

Consider environmental impact at every stage of production—from concept development to final delivery.

Encourage open dialogue with clients, challenge environmentally harmful practices, and seek more sustainable alternatives. Sustainable production begins with responsible storytelling and conscious creative decisions. What matters is not only how we produce, but also the messages we communicate.

Where possible, use production as an opportunity to promote environmental awareness and positive change.

REFUSE Do we really need it? Is there a more sustainable alternative?

Avoid unnecessary consumption, travel, materials, and activities that increase environmental impact.

Whenever possible, consider local production, remote collaboration, or CG/VFX solutions instead of long-distance travel. Air travel is often one of the largest sources of production-related emissions.

Reduce environmental impact by:

- limiting the number of locations,
- avoiding environmentally sensitive areas,
- using stock or archive footage,
- eliminating single-use and harmful materials,

- avoiding resource-intensive SFX or artificial snow,
- minimizing unnecessary lighting,
- choosing lower-impact creative solutions.

REDUCE What can we reduce?

Minimize travel, transportation, energy use, material consumption, and waste generation. Consuming fewer resources benefits both the environment and production budgets.

Prioritize local crews, talent, suppliers, and accommodation whenever possible. Use online meetings and shared transportation to reduce travel emissions.

Efficient planning, energy-efficient equipment, and low-emission technologies help reduce the use of energy, water, paper, construction materials, and other resources.

Replace single-use items with reusable alternatives, use digital workflows to reduce paper consumption, and select environmentally responsible materials whenever possible. Careful catering planning can also significantly reduce food waste

REUSE Can it be used again?

The most sustainable purchase is often the one you do not make.

Prioritize renting, borrowing, and reusing existing materials, props, costumes, set elements, and equipment. Reuse helps reduce waste, conserve resources, and lower costs.

Consider reuse during the creative development stage. Concepts and scripts can often be adapted to incorporate existing assets, locations, or previously recorded footage.

Food waste should also be minimized. Surplus meals can be redistributed through local food-sharing initiatives or donated to organizations supporting people in need.

RECYCLE What happens after production?

When reuse is not possible, ensure materials and products are properly recycled.

Plan ahead by considering the end-of-life destination of every purchased item and whether it is truly necessary. Procurement decisions should always aim to minimize waste.

Choose recycled or recyclable materials whenever possible, particularly for paper, set construction, props, and styling materials.

Proper recycling of paper, cardboard, plastics, metals, wood, electronic equipment, batteries, toner cartridges, and storage devices helps reduce waste and conserve resources. Support local recycling systems and ensure materials are disposed of responsibly.

EPA SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

1. SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Sustainability should be integrated into every stage of production from development and pre-production through post-production and delivery.

Each production should:

- appoint a sustainability coordinator or assign sustainability responsibilities to designated crew members,
- communicate sustainability expectations to all departments,
- integrate sustainability considerations into budgeting and scheduling,
- provide sustainability training and onboarding,
- encourage collaboration between clients, agencies, suppliers, and production partners.

Sustainability reporting should be documented at the end of each production to evaluate achievements, limitations, and opportunities for improvement.

2. TRANSPORTATION AND MOBILITY

Transportation remains one of the largest contributors to production-related emissions.

Productions should prioritize:

- local crews and suppliers whenever possible,
- public transportation,
- rail travel instead of flights for short and medium distances,
- shared transportation and carpooling,
- hybrid and electric vehicles,
- route optimization and consolidated deliveries.

Vehicle idling should be strictly minimized. Productions should encourage environmentally responsible commuting through call-sheet information, access to public transport, and bicycle infrastructure.

Flights should only be used when no practical lower-emission alternative exists.

3. ENERGY MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL OPERATIONS

Energy consumption associated with lighting, generators, equipment charging, studios, offices, and post-production facilities should be actively monitored and reduced.

Best practices include:

- prioritizing grid electricity over diesel generators,
- transitioning to renewable energy sources,
- using battery units and hybrid power systems
- implementing LED lighting solutions,
- turning off unused equipment,
- avoiding standby mode,
- installing energy-efficient heating and cooling systems,
- maximizing the use of natural daylight.

Rechargeable batteries should replace disposable batteries whenever technologically possible.

4. SUSTAINABLE CATERING AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Food systems significantly influence production-related waste and emissions.

Productions should:

- prioritize vegetarian and vegan catering options,
- reduce red meat consumption,
- source local and seasonal ingredients,
- work with environmentally responsible caterers,
- minimize packaging,
- eliminate single-use plastic bottles,
- implement refillable water systems,
- reduce food waste through proper planning and redistribution systems.

Reusable dishware and compostable alternatives should be prioritized whenever usable systems are not feasible.

5. MATERIALS, ART DEPARTMENT, AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The principles of reuse, reduction, repair, and recycling should guide all material-related decisions.

Productions should:

- rent equipment and props whenever possible,
- prioritize second-hand materials,
- design modular and reusable sets,
- store or donate reusable elements after production,
- avoid toxic materials,

- use biodegradable and recyclable products,
- select FSC or PEFC-certified wood,
- reduce unnecessary plastic usage.

Packaging systems should also prioritize reusable and recyclable solutions.

6. COSTUME, STYLING, AND MAKE-UP

Costume and styling departments should:

- prioritize second-hand, rented, and reused costumes,
- avoid unnecessary online purchasing and returns,
- reduce disposable garment covers and plastics,
- use environmentally certified cleaning products,
- select cruelty-free cosmetics,
- reduce disposable make-up tools,
- prioritize refillable or recyclable packaging.

Departments should continuously evaluate opportunities to reduce material waste while maintaining creative standards.

7. WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING

Waste management should begin during planning stages.

Productions should implement:

- clearly labelled segregation systems,
- recycling and composting programs,
- hazardous waste procedures,
- dedicated waste collection providers,
- disposal plans for sets, props, costumes, and consumables.

Departments should receive clear instructions regarding local recycling systems and environmental regulations.

8. WATER CONSERVATION

Productions should actively reduce unnecessary water consumption by:

- installing refill stations,
- using water-efficient appliances,
- educating crews about responsible use,
- avoiding bottled water,
- implementing environmentally safe wastewater disposal.

9. DIGITAL WORKFLOW AND ADMINISTRATION

Digitalization reduces both material usage and operational inefficiencies.

Productions should prioritize:

- digital call sheets,
- digital contracts,
- electronic invoicing,
- cloud collaboration systems,
- remote meetings,
- limited printing,
- recycled paper where printing remains necessary.

10. BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Productions filming in natural environments should:

- comply with local environmental regulations,
- reduce disturbances to wildlife,
- minimize noise and light pollution,
- restore damaged areas,
- limit off-road vehicle usage,
- avoid environmentally sensitive areas whenever possible.

11. WELL-BEING, EDUCATION, AND INDUSTRY CULTURE

Sustainability includes social sustainability and healthy working environments.

Productions should:

- ensure respectful and inclusive workplaces,
- support crew well-being,
- encourage sustainability awareness,
- provide sustainability education,
- foster transparent communication between departments.

12. CARBON MEASUREMENT AND OFFSETTING

Productions are encouraged to calculate carbon emissions using recognized industry calculators.

Data collection should include:

- transportation,
- accommodation,

- energy usage,
- catering,
- waste,
- materials.

Offsetting should only be considered after reduction measures have been fully explored and implemented.

13. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Sustainability standards must evolve alongside technology, legislation, and industry innovation.

Organizations should:

- review sustainability strategies annually,
- share best practices,
- encourage cross-border collaboration,
- support innovation,
- contribute to the development of harmonized European standards.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMPENSATION

Through certified companies, it is possible to engage in projects aimed at protecting nature, people, and the climate.

These may include initiatives that contribute to achieving the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, such as providing access to education, improving employment opportunities within local communities, developing renewable energy sources, or preventing deforestation.

Compensation, also known as offsetting, should only be undertaken after all possible actions and solutions have been implemented to reduce the negative impact of our production on the environment and climate.

Since 2006, Social Carbon Offset (SCO) has been operating in Poland — an innovative model for offsetting greenhouse gas emissions through investments in renewable energy sources.

CARBON FOOTPRINT CALCULATORS

Due to the ongoing work on a unified European CO_2 emissions calculator, which will help standardize sustainability requirements and general standards, we encourage you to independently explore the carbon footprint calculators currently available on the market:

- ADGREEN
- ALBERT
- CARBONCLAP
- E-MISSION
- EUREKA (PILOT)
- KLIMAKTIV
- PEAR

SUSTAINABILITY CERTIFICATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Certifications for companies implementing a sustainable strategy:

- BCORP
- ECOVADIS

Film production certifications:

- GREEN FILM

Organizations promoting sustainable film production:

- ADGREEN
- GREEN THE BID
- FILM DLA KLIMATU

The transition toward sustainable production requires collective responsibility and long-term commitment. European productions have the opportunity to establish globally recognized standards that combine creative excellence with environmental and social responsibility.

By implementing shared sustainable production principles, the audiovisual industry can significantly reduce its environmental footprint, support healthier working environments, strengthen local economies, and contribute to Europe's broader climate objectives. These guidelines are intended as a living framework designed to evolve with industry experience, technological advancement, and environmental priorities.