

How to issue a supplier code of conduct

A plain-English rollout checklist for supplier portals and buyer due-diligence packs

A buyer or portal asked whether you have a supplier code of conduct. Use these eight steps to write and issue one. Each step maps to a section in the ESG Complete free Word template.

How to use this guide

Work through each step in order. Tick off the "What to include" bullets against your draft. Prefer short, honest clauses over claims you cannot evidence. This is not legal advice; adapt wording to your operations and jurisdiction. Send the finished code at onboarding, send it to existing suppliers, and review it every 12 or 24 months.

1. Name who issues the code and who it binds

Suppliers need to know who wrote the code, what you buy, and how far it reaches before they can sign it.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Legal company name, country, and registration number
- A one-line description of what you buy
- Whether it binds direct suppliers, subcontractors, or the wider chain
- That local law still applies, and the higher standard wins

Tip: Stay factual. Do not invent supplier names or claim the code already covers every tier if you cannot reach them.

Use in template section: Introduction and scope

2. Set the labour and human-rights floor

Buyers expect ILO core conventions and the UN Guiding Principles named as the minimum, not a vague "we treat people well" line.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- ILO core conventions as the floor
- UNGPs named as the human-rights standard
- No forced labour, no child labour, no discrimination
- The higher of local labour law or the ILO floor

Tip: If you have higher-risk categories, add a short "particular attention" sentence. If you do not, omit it.

Use in template section: Labour and human rights

3. Prohibit modern slavery and ask for flow-down

A supplier code is one of the controls portals look for in modern slavery statements. Say what is banned and that suppliers must push it down.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- A clear ban on forced labour, trafficking, and the worst forms of child labour
- An expectation that suppliers check their own suppliers
- A duty to tell you if a risk appears on your account
- No invented audit scores or named suppliers

Tip: Flow-down only as far as the scope you chose. Do not claim you police the whole world.

Use in template section: Modern slavery

4. Require a safe workplace

Health and safety belongs in the code even if you already have a WHS policy. Suppliers need the same rule in the document they sign.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Comply with applicable WHS law or the local equivalent
- Identify hazards and train workers
- The right to stop unsafe work without retaliation
- A duty to report incidents that affect your work

Tip: Keep this legal and practical. Do not claim ISO 45001 unless the supplier actually holds it.

Use in template section: Health and safety

5. Cover ethics and anti-bribery

Anti-bribery, conflicts, fair competition, and a short privacy line. Cross-refer your existing policy if you have one.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- No bribes, kickbacks, or facilitation payments
- Conflicts of interest and fair competition
- Confidentiality and applicable privacy law
- A speak-up email or phone, with no retaliation

Tip: If you already have an anti-bribery policy, say this code sits alongside it. If not, let the ethics section stand alone.

Use in template section: Business ethics

6. Ask for lawful environmental practice

A supplier code is not an emissions statement. Require legal compliance and responsible use of resources.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Comply with environmental law that applies to their operations
- Responsible use of energy, water, and materials
- Lawful handling of waste and hazardous substances

Tip: Do not invent tonnes of CO2 or certificates. This is a code, not a performance report.

Use in template section: Environment

7. Say how you monitor and what happens on a breach

Reviewers look for a consequence. Questionnaires or a reasonable review are enough. Then state corrective action, termination, or both.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- You may ask for confirmation or review records
- A speak-up channel suppliers can use
- No retaliation for genuine reports
- What happens on a breach (corrective action, end the relationship, or both)

Tip: A generic “we may review compliance” is honest. Do not invent unannounced-audit rights you will never use.

Use in template section: Compliance and monitoring

8. Get a signed acknowledgement and put it in contracts

A code that nobody signs is a poster. Send it at onboarding, send it to existing suppliers, and reference it in purchase terms.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

- Issuer approval (name, title, date)
- A supplier sign-off block (company, name, title, date, signature)
- Send at onboarding and to existing suppliers
- Reference the code in contracts

Tip: Review the code every 12 or 24 months and re-issue when you change it.

Use in template section: Acknowledgement

After the eight steps: keep signed acknowledgements with your supplier records, and reference the code in contracts so it is more than a poster.

Prefer not to spend hours writing it?

Answer a short questionnaire and ESG Complete fills a branded Supplier Code of Conduct plus acknowledgement for you. Same eight sections as this guide. **US\$99**. Usually the same day. Revisions included.

Start here: <https://www.esgcomplete.com/supplier-code-of-conduct/thank-you?scroll=think-about>