

Chapter I

Introduction to environmental management

What is environmental management?

What do we mean by the words 'environment' and 'environmental management'?

The word 'environment' is used in different ways. We talk of the 'home environment', the 'work environment', the 'social environment'. We use the word to describe our physical surroundings, made up of air, trees, grass. It is this latter use that is the subject of this book. Our concern must be for the world as a whole, its 'air, water, land, natural resources, flora, fauna, humans, and their inter-relations', to quote from ISO 14001.

By 'environmental management' we mean keeping control of our activities so that we do what we can to conserve these physical resources and to avoid polluting them. We can apply these controls in our life domestically, in what we buy and what we throw away, but it is usually in our work where the environmental impact of what we do is greatest. Such has been the impact of industrial activity that resources are becoming depleted and environmental damage is increasing. Some of the steps taken by the international community and governments to control and improve the situation are described in Chapter 2.

In this book, we are concerned with control at the level of the business, whether that be a chemical works or a refinery, engineering, printing, transport, or even office based businesses or teaching where the environmental impacts may be smaller but are still real. Because of the all-embracing nature of environmental management, the word 'organisation' has been used throughout the book to describe your business, firm or company.

What are the benefits?

There are four reasons why every organisation should take environmental factors into account in its management processes: ethical, economic, legal and commercial.

Ethical

As human beings we have a duty to look after the world in which we live and to hand it on to our children in good shape.

Economic

Conserving resources and not generating waste products or wasting energy means we save on cost.

There is also increasing evidence that insurance companies will consider a reduction in premiums if by having proper managerial control over environmental risks the likelihood of there being a disaster should be reduced. If your organisation is overseen by the

ISO 14001 Environmental Certification Step by Step

Environment Agency, i.e. your processes fall within the scope of the integrated pollution prevention and control legislation, it is heartening to note that the Agency is experimenting with linking the level of regulation to whether an organisation has an externally verified environmental management system or not.

Legal

More and more governments including our own are passing laws to control how we interact with the environment. Therefore we need systems to make sure we stay within the law, otherwise we can be fined and damage our reputation.

Commercial

More and more large organisations are taking control of their environmental responsibilities and they expect their suppliers and subcontractors to do the same. Without evidence of an environmental management system you may find the number of customers prepared to trade with you will start to fall. On the other hand, by being able to demonstrate good environmental practice, new market opportunities may open up to you.

ISO 14001

ISO 14001 has been developed as a formalised structure for an environmental management system which can be independently assessed for compliance. This corresponds exactly to the ISO 9001 quality systems which will be familiar to many readers. In fact, as is shown throughout the book, organisations that are already registered to ISO 9001 can integrate their environmental management system with their existing ISO 9001 structure and so build on what they already have rather than starting anew.

ISO 14001 can be adopted by any organisation. There are no restrictions on the type of activities which can be assessed. It is hoped that non-manufacturing organisations will read this book and decide that environmental management is as much for them as it is for the factory down the road.

What will it cost?

As with any management initiative, the biggest cost is the effort that you have to put into creating, launching and maintaining your environmental management system. This book is intended to help you to do this as painlessly as possible by leading you through each stage of the process and offering you sample documents and texts that you can adapt to fit your circumstances, instead of your having to start with a blank sheet of paper and wondering where to go next. The book is intended to be particularly helpful if you are a small organisation.

It is too easy to make things too complicated. The aim must be to create as simple a system as possible yet cover all the essentials. In this way you minimise the effort needed to create and maintain the system, you use less paper and you make it straightforward for your workforce to understand what is required of them. Success should be easier.

You cannot avoid the cost of the assessment, but by going into the market for competitive quotations you can be sure you are not paying too much. This is discussed further in Chapter 12.

Many organisations have found that they save more than the cost of the project in a year simply by giving attention to how they use energy in the forms of gas or electricity, or where they use water, or how much they are paying to dispose of the waste which they need not create.

This book

The book falls into four main sections:

- Chapters 2–4 describe the global environmental initiatives and the background to ISO 14001.
- Chapters 5–9 go through the stages of creating a documented environmental management system (EMS).

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- Chapters 10–12 give advice on launching the EMS and how to prepare for the assessment.
- Chapters 13–14 describe the European Eco-Management & Audit Scheme (EMAS) and write about integrated management systems which can bring together environment, quality, health and safety, and other management functions.

The book is supported by three supplementary volumes which contain typical documents that you can use as models when you come to document your own environmental activities:

- model Registers of Environmental Aspects and Environmental Legislation;
- model Operating Procedures;
- model Environmental Management Manual.

These are also available on the accompanying website (see the Preface) and can be downloaded and adapted to suit your circumstances.