

BENEFITING FROM ISO14001: THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

BY GLORIA SCHMITT

In today's business a clear trend has emerged. Key customers and regulatory agencies have opted for suppliers and services with Quality and Environmental Management Systems already in place. Why? Companies with these characteristics have a long term commitment to environmental responsibility, continual improvement of service and/or product and a commitment to customer satisfaction.

Being cognizant of the environment when making everyday business decisions can be easily achieved. An Environmental Management System (EMS) provides the necessary guidelines that enable your business to become more efficient, productive, competitive and environmentally responsible.

ISO14001 is an internationally recognized standard for Environmental Management Systems derived by the International Organization of Standardization. The standard provides generic elements that can be custom-tailored for your specific business.

Begin by creating an environmental policy statement supported by top management that distinguishes the organization's long term commitment to comply with environmental regulations, prevention of pollution and continual improvement of product or services. Next, identify the environmental impacts of your activities, products or services that significantly affect the environment. Based on those impacts, determine your objectives and target.

Additionally, to comply with ISO14001, the following standard elements must be addressed:

- Create standard operating procedures that document how each significant environmental aspect is controlled and monitored. Procedures should relate to legal and other compliance requirements, environmental management programs, operation and process controls and emergency preparedness and response
- Document the organizations personnel resources to demonstrate that you possess the people to implement the system. Provide evidence establishing that each employee is trained in any element of your environmental management system that pertains to their individual job function
- Audit your management system regularly by internal auditors, as well as, an external auditing firm, to assure the system continues to be effective
- Create a procedure to correct deficiencies found when monitoring and measuring the continued effectiveness of your procedures (Corrective Actions), as well as, actions that could improve your overall processes (Preventative Actions)
- Require top management to hold periodic management review meetings to discuss and review your Environmental Management System
- Create a procedure identifying how each procedure, policy or program is created, implemented, maintained, controlled and documented

The advantage of the ISO14001 standard is that each individual organization has the autonomy to define the limits of its own system. Environmental Management Systems can be implemented in both the small and large firm, either throughout the entire company or within designated operational divisions. Companies who currently possess the ISO9001 (or like) registration can incorporate the environmental management system relatively easily by utilizing existing management system principles.

Your environmental management systems should encompass aspects that pertain to product/service design and development; handling, storage, packaging, preservation and disposal of waste; recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation.

Your organization should designate a management representative that acts as the liaison between the employees and upper management. Involving your employees in the development of your system from the start is crucial to your long term success. Individuals performing operational tasks need to know they contribute to the success of your Environmental Management System.

When effectively used, your Environmental Management System can significantly improve your environmental performance and diminish adverse environmental impacts. Moreover, validating your commitment to the environment and continual operational improvement will positively affect the success of your organization both short and long term by providing the following benefits:

- Ensuring compliance with regulations and thereby reducing the risk of environmental fines and lawsuits
- Improving your organization's image
- Improving the quality of the workplace resulting in increased employee morale
- Increasing your client base by soliciting organizations who give preferential opportunities to environmental responsible companies
- The financial savings associated proactive management strategies in lieu of reactive management strategies.

About the author:

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