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14K DOES IT PAY? FACTORING SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE EMS EQUATION

Close your eyes for a moment and picture the manufacturing plant of the future. Can you see it? It's incredible. A symbiotic relationship between man, machine and mother nature working in conjunction with as many natural systems as possible to produce **balanced products**. For the environment, balanced products are products produced with a **zero or an enhanced net effect** to the environment. For business, balanced products produce an enhanced effect to the bottom line since costs related to all wastes are eliminated. Additionally, the bottom line is further enhanced by a revised tax structure that rewards businesses for environmental performance. Imagine a business getting a tax credit for preserving or replacing resources? What a concept! We have finally gotten it right. Now ask yourself, does an ISO 14001 environmental management system (EMS) get us to that vision? The answer quite frankly is NO, but it's a start.

ISO 14001 is the most recognized Environment Management System (EMS) in the world, but is it the solution to environmental management? A systems approach can make a facility more proactive depending on how it is developed and implemented. But, it is only the first step in a series of steps needed to create a sustainable future, Sustainable meaning simply enough "meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of tomorrow". There are two critical items not stressed upon in the ISO 14001 standard and these are crucial to creating balanced products that help bring forth a sustainable future. But first we need to understand why ISO 14001 is being embraced by the rest of the world while we Americans are waiting to see if this is what we really want and or need.

Essentially there are two reasons why American business has been waiting.

The first, of course, is money, the almighty dollar. Companies will not implement an EMS until there is some type of competitive advantage (real or imagined) gained in doing so. The second reason is our culture. To the average American this is still a BIG country with unlimited resources. (Not to mention that the environment was trendy in the early 90's, hey, I already did the Earth Day thing.) We've also found that if the resources are becoming scarce here, we can exert enough pressure (financial and/or military) to get what we need elsewhere. Now add to this an extremely shortsighted culture, both business and personal lives, find it nearly impossible to grasp the Eastern concept of "7th generation". It's hard for us to think of great grandkids!! Lastly, the success equation today in the US continues to be "success=consumption=success" . It is what we were all

raised to do. Can't blame us. Consumption is the American definition of success. Fortunately, most of the world due to geography, politics and/or finances does not think the way we do.

As I mentioned before, there are a couple of critical items not stressed upon in the ISO 14001 standard. These are *business integration* and *sustainability*.

Business integration is essential. Environmental issues must be integrated into the day to day activities of the business. Environmental management can no longer be a "departmental function". In the integrated business, an Environmental Manager's focus is on proactive strategic planning instead of "fire fighting" compliance issues. In this business, the Environmental Manager routinely contributes to the bottom line and is not considered overhead, a necessary evil or the designated jailee. Also, in this business ALL environmental costs are accounted for when producing the product/service. ISO 14001 does not touch on this but your EMS could and should to make it truly effective. Again, business integration is essential.

After environmental activities are fully integrated into the business, the business can concentrate on becoming sustainable by focusing on innovation in addition to incremental improvements. Innovations and "fringe" thinking are the only way to develop the ideas and technology necessary to create the sustainable plant of the future. Here, the Environmental Manager will work closely with R&D, production and other departments. Innovation works best when it is a multidisciplinary approach. To this end, a business will use the input of many specialties not usually associated with its core products/services. This could include a futurist, ecologist, biologist, urban planner, industrial engineer, etc. Currently, there are no truly sustainable businesses in this world, so we have a lot to do in a short amount of time. It is an exciting time for business and the realm of environmental management!

In summary, the plant of the future will be unlike anything we know now. It will take both integration and innovation to make this plant a reality. To get there a business must:

- Develop an EMS such as ISO 14001 to make the environmental function proactive.
- Integrate the environmental function into daily business decisions.
- Quantify and track environmental performance.
- Establish a multidisciplinary team to develop and implement innovative ideas and technologies that create a truly sustainable plant. And in turn help create a sustainable planet.

Integration and innovation will make the sustainable plant a reality. Americans excel at creating innovative ideas, so it is time for Americans to do what they do best. Also since America is the most resource intensive culture on the planet, it is

imperative that we start now to reduce our impact on the future as well as the planet. This will ensure a profitable future as well as a future to be profitable in.