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ISO 14001:2004 - DOES IT AFFECT YOUR FUTURE?

Interest in ISO 14001 programs in the United States has varied over the past ten years. Innovators implemented the standards early in the process, but the widespread, voluntary embrace of the process that was expected in the late 1990's did not materialize. Driven mostly by client requirements, more companies have recently pursued ISO 14001 certification, but most companies still have not recognized the benefits that this program can provide.

This was illustrated in our most recent "Industry and the Environment" survey (conducted periodically by ASTI Environmental since 1999). The results of the survey indicated that 50% of respondents are ISO 14001 certified. This is in comparison to 23% who indicated that they were certified in 2002.

However, of the respondents who said they are not currently certified, only 8% said they plan to pursue certification in the future. This compares to the 32% of uncertified companies who indicated they would seek certification in 2002.

A survey published in May, 2005 by Strategic SME Group showed similar percentages for respondents who were certified. However, the SME study revealed some other interesting results. The majority of respondents indicated that the top reason for implementation of ISO 14001 is customer requirement. The second reason

is improved environmental compliance. When asked for the barriers they faced in implementing an Environmental Management Systems (EMS), they indicated lack of time and lack of staff resources.¹

When looking at the number of ISO 14001 certifications by country, the United States comes in sixth behind Japan, China, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. Although the United States has 5,100 certifications, it is small in comparison to Japan's 19,477.² Considering the number of American companies, the United States is lagging behind many other countries in certifications.

As indicated in our survey, and from our experience with manufacturers in the Midwest, the U.S. is making progress, but there are still many companies not implementing the ISO process. Without the inducement to comply with customer requirements, many companies are not willing to make the investment needed to achieve certification.

ISO 14001:2004 VERSUS ISO 14001:1996

While some U.S. companies have been deciding whether to embrace the ISO 14001 process, the standards have been changed to address a wide range of issues, including consistency with other quality management systems and clarification of some technical issues. The latest revision, ISO

14001:2004, primarily provides clarification and updated terminology. Additional requirements for training documentation and proof of competence have been included, and a section on internal communication, similar to the external communication requirements, has been added. For U.S. companies, where the focus has traditionally been on compliance with “command and control” regulations, there is a new emphasis on compliance. The most significant change for companies with existing quality management systems is better alignment between the ISO14001 and ISO 9000:2000 processes.

The original ISO 14001:1996, published in 1996, has now been replaced by the ISO 14001:2004 which was published on November 16, 2004. Companies that achieved certification with the ISO 14001:1996 standard were provided a transition period to recertify under the new standard. Since the International Accreditation Form, Inc. (IAF) no longer recognizing 1996 certification, companies previously certified under the 1996 standard, who have not received recertification under the new standard, may no longer be ISO 14001 qualified.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

If you are ISO14001:1996 certified, it may mean that you need to review your program and obtain recertification under the new standard. This would be an opportunity to update your corporate policy, check on changes in compliance requirements, and integrate your ISO14001 and ISO9000 programs.

If you are not certified, but are considering certification, either because of client requirements or a desire to improve performance, this is a good time to design a program to fit your needs. The ISO 14001 process can assist your company by establishing, implementing, maintaining and improving an environmental management

system that assures operational conformity with your stated environmental policy. In addition to providing a systematic method to assurance compliance with federal, state and local environmental regulations, the ISO 14001 system can also be used to reduce costs and identify processes or procedures that require modifications.

STEPS FOR YOUR NEW CERTIFICATION

Your current EMS status will determine the changes needed to bring your organization in line with the new standards (Everyone has an EMS, it just may not be the one you think you have). The first step is to determine the form and format of your EMS and your current compliance status. The second step is to identify processes and procedures that support your environmental policy, and begin creating a system to implement the ISO requirements. ASTI is ready to help companies meet these standards and prepare for the future. From initial assessments to system redesign, our staff can upgrade your current system, or help you to create a new one.

Footnotes

1 *The Global Use of Environmental Management System, Executive Report from ISO/TC207/SC1/ Strategic SME Group, May 2005.*

2 *Worldwide ISO14001/EMAS statistical numbers collected by Reinhard Peglau, c/o Federal Environmental Agency, Germany, January 2006.*

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