Environmental Management Systems

Workers are becoming more active on environmental issues both inside and outside the workplace. This is welcome because many work activities contribute to major environmental problems including:

▲ **global warming and climate change** believed to be caused by a build up of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide

▲ **depletion of the ozone layer** by chloroflorocarbons (CFCs), once common in refrigerators, and aerosols with a consequent increase in skin cancer and cataracts from increased exposure to u.v. radiation

▲ **acid rain** from sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions, primarily from power stations and motor vehicles

▲ the creation and disposal of **waste.** The UK generates around 400 million tonnes of solid waste a year and landfill is less and less an option

▲ pollution of land, water, and air

Why should unions 'go green'?

There are many benefits for companies in using energy more efficiently, and cutting waste. The advantage for trade unions, in addition to the long-term benefit of saving the planet, is that environmental issues overlap with health and safety issues. Noisy processes and hazardous chemicals affect both workers and the community. Women and young people are most interested in environmental issues and taking these up as part of collective bargaining can aid in recruitment and organisation and improve the union's image. While workers in the most polluting industries will feel threatened by redundancy if environmental regulation starts to bite, jobs in environment-friendly industries are growing and are likely to replace many hazardous jobs in the future.

What is an Environmental Management System?

This is a comprehensive and effective management tool for assessing, monitoring and controlling the environmental pollution produced by a company or organisation. It is more thorough than ad-hoc approaches such as recycling paper, using low energy light bulbs and "switch off" campaigns, or installing low-flush toilets and taps, because it puts systems in place to ensure the organisation has a genuine and positive impact on the environment. A good system will incorporate an environmental policy, recycling of materials, waste minimisation, and energy saving programmes. If it is monitored it will not be just the token gestures favoured by some companies who produce regular environmental reports or set up environmental "stakeholder" groups; these are little more than publicity stunts to promote a brand name. Environmental credentials are now selling points and enhance a company's reputation but a critical approach is needed: some initiatives simply pay lip service to the green agenda.

Eco-audit. This is a broad term covering all systems designed to improve an organisation's performance. It is not necessary to be part of a formal registration scheme (see later) in order to conduct an audit. The techniques involved are not unduly complicated. The opportunity should be taken to involve the safety committee and the safety reps where these are present.

Registration schemes.

The European Union Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS) is a voluntary scheme. The EMAS Regulation (761/2001) was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the European Union and by the European Parliament in 2001. The European Commission published guidance to support its implementation, in the form of a Decision and a Recommendation. It

was established originally by European Regulation 1836/93.

The scheme aims to recognise and reward those organisations that go beyond minimum legal compliance and continuously improve their environmental performance.

Any type of organisation can apply to register with EMAS. Although initially aimed at industrial sites, it now permits registration from all types of organisation from all economic sectors including retailers, banks, airports, power companies, manufacturing companies, printers and local authorities (as part of Agenda 21). All can participate in the scheme. EMAS is flexible: single site or multi-site organisations can apply to register.

EMAS requires the involvement of employees in the process of improving the organisation's environmental performance.

With EMAS, the management system and the actual audit must be validated by an independent verifier, similar to the way company accounts are subject to an independent audit

The British Standards Institute (BSI) and the International Standards Organisation (ISO) have developed another voluntary standard: ISO 14001 which has replaced BS7750. This standard overlaps with EMAS and the BS8800 occupational health and safety management system. ISO 14001 does not require any external verification of the auditing and management systems.

Seven steps to EMAS. To gain EMAS accreditation companies must:

1. develop an **environmental policy** – committing the company to compliance with existing legislation and to continuous improvement of its environmental performance
2. conduct an **environmental review** – to identify all the environmental impacts of a site
3. set up an **environmental programme** – to put policy into practice

4. create a **management system** – to organise and document the programme, and make clear who does what within the organisation
5. develop an **audit cycle** – to check the programme's progress at regular intervals
6. produce an **annual public statement** that outlines clearly and concisely how the company has met its stated objectives
7. subject the system to **external validation** – an accredited verifier, independent of the site auditor, must validate both the management system and the statement

EMAS has several features which make it superior to ISO 14001. In addition to external validation, EMAS requires

▲ an audit, review, and annual public statement. ISO 14001 merely recommends such action

▲ that companies move towards levels of performance compatible with the "economically viable application of best available technology" (EVABAT); ISO 14001 is less strict

▲ communication with "public authorities, the public and contractors". ISO 14001 does not require this

However only 82 UK companies are registered on the EMAS database compared with 2,917 companies on the ISO 14001 database. EMAS at local authority level is tied in with Agenda 21. Two London councils have achieved EMAS registration: Camden Property Services Division and the London Borough of Sutton.

Agenda 21. This is the environmental action plan for the 21st century adopted at the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It set out aims for achieving sustainable development specifically for local councils. Agenda 21 says, "Workers should participate in environment and development activities within the local community. They should have access to adequate training to augment environmental awareness."

Who does what? The EMAS Regulation identifies a number of players with responsibilities. These are:

Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This is responsible for

appointing the Competent Body and the Accreditation Body which promote the scheme and ensure implementation

Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). This is the EMAS Competent Body responsible for registering, suspending or deleting sites.

United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS). This is the EMAS Accreditation Body responsible for ensuring the competence of environmental verifiers, through witnessed assessments and ongoing supervision of their activities.

Competent Enforcement Authority. This is responsible for informing the Competent Body if an organisation is in breach of legal requirements. Depending on the location of the organisation, the regulators are the Environment Agency, Scottish Environment Protection Agency and/or the Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service, the DTI and the local authority.

Environmental Verifiers. They are responsible for validating that an organisation's policy and management system comply with the requirements of the regulation and that the information in the environmental statement is accurate and reliable. A full list of verifiers is available from UKAS.

Quick company checklist

For reps who want to start negotiating on environmental matters now, a checklist produced by the Transport and General Workers Union is a handy tool.

RESOURCE CONSUMPTION
Are materials drawn from renewable sources?
▲ Are materials re-usable?
▲ Could materials be replaced with

lower grade or waste materials?
▲ Is the use of energy monitored and controlled (via bills for example)? And at the level of individual operations?
▲ Is the product made to last?

WASTE
▲ Can the amount of waste be reduced?
▲ Can hazardous materials be made harmless? Or contained?
▲ Will wastes stored on site be secure and environmental damage minimised?
▲ Will wastes be separated to make it easier to recycle them?
▲ Are there contingency plans for fires, spills and other emergencies?

AIR
▲ Is the use of environmentally damaging materials avoided or minimised? For example CFCs; sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions; volatile organic compounds?
▲ Is there a formal review system to prevent accidental emissions/discharges?

GENERAL
▲ Is energy used efficiently?
▲ Is there a policy to take noise, vibration, dust and fume output into account when purchasing new equipment?
▲ Have all potential discharge products been identified and controls developed?
▲ Are there contingency plans for external pollution control if a control system breaks down?

COMPLAINTS
▲ Have there been complaints of noise, litter, smells, etc. from neighbours?
▲ Are processes reviewed as a result of complaints from the community?