

How Standards contribute to Sustainable Development

Press feature for WET News

In 2007, *The Economics of Climate Change* (also known as *The Stern Review*) noted that unabated climate change alone will cost between 5 per cent and 20 per cent of global consumption. Sustainable development therefore should be considered an essential response to this issue.

It seems that water industry contractors not only have a significant role to play in ensuring that we have a sustainable community by effectively managing our natural water resources, but they need to ensure that as organisational entities they operate a sustainable business model for themselves, their stakeholders and employees.

Sustainable development within the business arena requires balanced progress towards three interconnected objectives as follows:

- Strong financial performance – profitability and competitiveness bringing benefits to shareholders and securing long term growth and security of employment for the future
- Environmental excellence – preventing pollution and optimising resource efficiency in operations, and developing products or services with minimal lifecycle environmental impacts
- Social responsibility – meeting the wider concerns of stakeholders (for example employees, suppliers, customers, local communities) over issues such as working conditions, human rights and community involvement

How though can organisations best engage with sustainable development? One approach is through the use of management systems standards.

“Organisations are under growing pressure to keep the confidence of customers, employees, shareholders and a growing array of other organisational stakeholders,” says Victoria Barron, Product Marketing Manager, Sustainability Portfolio at BSI. “By establishing a meaningful framework and embedding responsible decision making into all of its business activities, an organisation has the opportunity to demonstrate good business practice and ethical trading. This is where the role of management system standards comes in - to assess that minimum standards in terms of environmental and social practices are upheld in the workplace.”

Management systems standards already have a strong track record of enabling organisations to pursue sustainable development. For instance, ISO confirms that up to the end of 2007 around 155,000 certificates of compliance with the environmental management systems standard ISO 14001:2004 had been issued in 148 countries.

In the context of sustainability, management systems standards have an extremely useful role to play because they provide a roadmap for implementing sustainable development in an increasing number of areas. As awareness of sustainability grows, the number of management systems standards which address specific sustainability issues has risen rapidly over the last 5-10 years.

An example of one such management system standard helping organisations to address sustainable development is ISO 14001. More and more organisations are seeing the ISO 14001 as providing a structured approach to the management of environmental performance and legal compliance within their organisations. ISO 14001 focuses the organisation on being proactive in identifying key environmental aspects and impacts associated with their activities and driving down risks. In doing so, an organisation can benefit from improved operational effectiveness leading to reduced costs and improved profits.

It is important to note that as sustainability is underpinned by the need to not only understand the impacts of our activities on the environment, the economy and society as a whole, other standards such as Quality Management (ISO 9001) , Health and Safety (BS OHSAS 18001) and Business Continuity (BS 25999) are equally as relevant to sustainable development.

“Some organisations, particularly small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) find the concept of sustainability daunting,” says Mike Bailey, Director for Training at BSI. “BSI Training offers a full range of courses related to sustainable development, from introductory, system implementation to improvement training. Increasingly for water industry contractors these courses not only help them contribute to sustainable futures, but provide a platform for them to win new business and retain compliance to the standards which is often a requirement for successful tenders.”

For a full range of training products and to download the BSI Training schedule, please visit www.bsigroup.co.uk/training or call 0845 086 9000.