

Benefits of a step-up from Ekoskan to EMAS

A step up from Ekoskan to EMAS can provide organisations with significant additional benefits. Organisations that decide to step up from Ekoskan to EMAS will most importantly benefit from an internationally acknowledged scheme that is not only recognised in the Basque country but all over Europe. This might be an important additional benefit for those companies operating internationally or with an international client base. Additional environmental benefits can be expected since under EMAS not only the direct but also the indirect environmental aspects need to be taken into account. This can also lead to additional financial benefits as resources are saved and efficiency is improved. The publication and verification of an environmental report is not obligatory and stepping up to EMAS can lead to improved communication possibilities. Occupational health and safety are not part of Ekoskan and stepping up to EMAS the company benefits from a systematisation of the management of its major risks related to workplace safety and emergency preparedness. Finally, EMAS offers the advantage of being legally recognised through a European Council Regulation and certified organisations are listed in a public register.

Introduction

Origin and development

Ekoskan was established in 1998 and has been constantly updated and developed ever since. In 2004 it became a certifiable standard, which has been successfully implemented by 202 companies so far. The Ekoskan certificate does not only mean that an environmental improvement plan has been defined, but also that the plan has obtained real results. Organisations that reach the second stage, in which the fulfilment of the environmental legal requirements are verified, obtain the Ekoskan Plus Certificate. The EMS is concentrated in the Basque Country in Spain and is implemented by IHOBE, a public company responsible for environmental management in the Basque country. The Department for Environment and Land of the Basque government sponsors the Ekoskan programme. IHOBE (a public company working in environmental management and fully dependant on the Basque government) is the intellectual driver behind the initiative, serves as an administrator, and initiates further development. Different private consultancies support the implementation of Ekoskan. IHOBE signed agreements with 7 certification bodies (AENOR, BV-ECA, DnV, IAC, LQRA, SGS, TÜV), to develop the EMS as a certifiable standard.

Objectives

The Ekoskan scheme responds to the need to define an objective and transparent system that acknowledges, through external assessment, the efforts to improve environmental practices made by many organisations. It helps companies systemise environmental management and ensures compliance with the applicable environmental legislation.

Closeness to EMAS

Ekoskan can be considered as a stepping-stone to EMAS since a successful Ekoskan certification means that a number of important steps towards EMAS have already been taken. IHOBE is currently developing guidelines on how to step up from Ekoskan to EMAS. The most fundamental steps that need to be taken to step-up from Ekoskan to EMAS lie in the areas of external recognition, the integration of emergency preparedness and response, training and awareness, raising a number of additional criteria have to be fulfilled. These steps are presented on page 2 of this document.

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From Ekoscan to EMAS: Additional Steps

Please note that this document provides an overview of additional steps that need to be taken by an organisation to 'step-up' from Ekoscan to EMAS. For further details on each requirement, please see the EMAS website on www.ec.europa.eu/environment/emas.

Step 1 - Setting the Baseline

- **Environmental policy/guidelines**

It needs to be ensured that the compliance with legal requirements is part of the environmental policy to fulfil EMAS requirements.

Step 2 - Planning

- **Environmental aspects and review**

Indirect environmental aspects need to be identified and evaluated to fulfil EMAS requirements.

Step 3 - Implementation

- **Training and awareness raising**

All EMAS criteria related to training and awareness raising need to be fulfilled to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Communication**

Communication from external interested parties needs to be replied to and general openness and transparency regarding environmental information needs to be demonstrated to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Documentation**

Other documents such as records regarding planning, operation and control need to be included in the documentation to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Control of documents and operational control**

To fulfil EMAS requirements, documentation has to be maintained up-to-date, and procedures related to significant impacts arising from the use of goods and services needs to be communicated to suppliers where necessary.

- **Emergency preparedness and response**

Potential risks and procedures to mitigate these have to be defined and tested periodically to fulfil EMAS requirements.

Step 4 - Check and Act

- **Checking and corrective action**

Procedures for non-conformity and for taking corrective and preventive actions have to be established to fulfil EMAS requirements.

- **Internal audit**

Regular internal audits need to be carried out by impartial auditors and results have to be communicated to management to fulfil EMAS requirements.

- **Management review**

Recommendations and need for change needs to be part of the management review to fulfil EMAS requirements.

Step 5 - External Recognition and Environmental Report

- **Third-party auditing and audit frequency**

All criteria related to third-party auditing need to be fulfilled to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Environmental report/ statement**

All criteria related to the environmental statement need to be fulfilled to comply with EMAS requirements.