

Benefits of a Step-up from EcoStep to EMAS

A step-up from EcoStep to EMAS can provide organisations with significant additional benefits: environmental benefits can be expected, as under EMAS not only direct but also indirect environmental impacts need to be taken into account. This can also lead to financial benefits, as resources are saved and efficiency is improved. Furthermore, the publication and verification of an environmental statement that is required under EMAS but not under Eco-Step provides organisations with improved communication possibilities. Similarly, EcoStep has a geographical focus on Germany and, to a lesser extent, Italy and France. Registering under EMAS would provide organisations with the possibility to benefit from a scheme with a wider geographic focus as EMAS is operational Europe-wide with the possibility to be implemented and recognised in third countries under the new EMAS regulation. This might be of special interest to organisations with an international client base. 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

EcoStep was developed between 2001 and 2004 by the "Umweltallianz Hessen" (a cooperation between the government of the German Land Hessen and representatives of industry and trade). EcoStep was established under the idea that because of financial and time constraints SMEs are often not in a position to run several management systems at the same time. A scheme is therefore required that integrates the different demands a company must meet, including: issues of corporate management, occupational health and safety, quality, and environmental impacts. EcoStep offers this integrated approach within a scheme that is certified and process-oriented.

Over a period of 6-9 months, groups of up to 15 companies that want to implement EcoStep attend 4-5 workshops with EcoStep consultants. Furthermore, the companies are visited on site 4 times during the process for individual consultations. The scheme is open to companies of up to 500 employees of all sectors.

The Environment Ministry of Hessen and the RKW Bremen GmbH (management consultancy) are responsible for the scheme and operate as a contractual relationship with the implementing consultants. The EcoStep scheme is audited and certified by DQS (a German management system certification body).

As of 2009, approximately 40 organisations are EcoStep certified and 10 are in the process of certification.

Objectives

The objective of EcoStep is to integrate the basic requirements of different management systems within one scheme to facilitate their implementation by SMEs. The programme is developed on the basis of the main requirements of management systems such as ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and EMAS which also facilitates an easy step-up at a later stage. Furthermore, it takes into account real processes within companies to ensure that only real needs and possibilities are addressed. The main areas that are addressed are environmental protection, health and safety, and quality management. One of the original objectives of the EMS was to operate without the assistance of external consultants; however, this has not proven to be manageable.

Closeness to EMAS

EcoStep can be considered as a stepping stone towards EMAS, as a successful EcoStep certification means that some important steps towards an EMAS certification have been taken. However, its easier implementation also means that certain additional steps will have to be taken in order to register under EMAS. The most fundamental of these additional steps lie in the areas of communication, documentation and the environmental report. These steps are outlined on page 2 of this brochure.

For further information on the EMS, please contact:

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From EcoStep 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 EcoStep to EMAS. For further details on each requirement, please see the EMAS website on www.ec.europa.eu/environment/emas.

EcoStep already fulfils all EMAS requirements under Step 4. However, to obtain an EMAS registration, the steps that would need to be taken in addition to those already required under EcoStep include:

Step 1 – Setting the Baseline

- **Environmental policy/guidelines**

The policy needs to be appropriate to environmental impacts and to be made available to the public in order to comply with EMAS requirements.

Step 2 - Planning

- **Environmental aspects and review**

The Identification and evaluation of indirect environmental aspects is required to fulfil EMAS criteria.

- **Definition of objectives, targets and programmes**

The EMS needs to be based on current environmental performance to fulfil EMAS requirements.

Step 3 - Implementation

- **Employee involvement**

An employee participation scheme is required at all levels, including information and participation, and employees need to participate in continuous improvement to fulfil EMAS requirements.

- **Training and awareness raising**

Specific training needs need to be identified to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Communication**

Procedures for internal and external communication need to be established and the environmental information need to be revised periodically to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Documentation**

Documentation is not necessarily sufficient and requires a review to comply with EMAS requirements.

- **Emergency preparedness and response**

Periodic testing is required to fulfil EMAS criteria.

Step 5 - External Recognition and Environmental Report

- **Environmental report/ statement**

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