

Benefits of a Step-up from Green Office to EMAS

Many additional steps need to be taken by organisations that want to step-up from Eco-Lighthouse to EMAS. Taking these steps can provide organisations with significant benefits. Additional environmental benefits can be expected as indirect environmental impacts of the organisation will need to be identified and evaluated under EMAS. Moreover, organisations can experience further financial benefits due to, for example, efficiency improvements and better risk management. An EMAS registration will also provide organisations with improved communication possibilities through certified third-party auditing and a validated environmental statement. Further employee involvement and training under EMAS can lead to improved employee morale and a better implementation of the EMS. Finally, through a regular review of the EMS by management, the effectiveness of the scheme can be increased significantly. As the Green Office Management System is currently only implemented in Finland, organisations might also benefit from the larger geographic scope of EMAS. 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

Green Office is a voluntary certification programme operated by WWF Finland. It is a practical environmental programme that is easy to implement. Its aim is to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and offices' ecological footprint. Green Office is suited to offices – both large and small – in private companies, the public sector and other organisations. The scheme benefits both the organisation and the environment and provides its participants with advice and information on how to achieve energy and resource savings. Furthermore it provides stakeholders with information about offices, which are considered 'green', i.e., whether they are good potential business partners or attractive employers to work for. WWF Finland initiated the programme in response to business partners' requests. The Green Office programme is run by WWF Finland in cooperation with other organisations, such as Motiva, the Finnish Energy Agency, on specific issues. WWF awards the Green Office designation to offices fulfilling the criteria of the Green Office programme. The Green Office network in Finland comprises around 140 organisations, of which around 80 have been granted the right to use the Green Office logo (figures as of September 2009). As of 2009, approximately 80 organisations are Green Office certified in Finland.

Objectives

The aim of the programme is to offer offices a simplified environmental management and certification system, with a special focus on CO₂ emissions. The ultimate goal of Green Office is to combat climate change through increased energy efficiency, the use of renewables, reduced natural resource use, and the promotion of sustainable lifestyles through enhanced employee awareness.

Closeness to EMAS

Green Office is considered as a stepping-stone to EMAS by many organisations. A successful Green Office 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 environmental policy and review, employee involvement, training, documentation, emergency preparedness and response, management review, third-party auditing and the environmental statement. These steps are outlined on page 2 of this brochure.

From Green Office 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 Green Office 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**

The environmental policy requires a review to conform to EMAS requirements

Step 2 - Planning

- **Environmental aspects and review**

Indirect environmental aspects need to be identified and evaluated.

Step 3 - Implementation

- **Employee involvement**

An employee participation scheme needs to be implemented

- **Training and awareness raising**

Training needs for individual employees need to be defined and given to those employees that cause significant environmental impacts.

- **Documentation**

Documentation is not necessarily sufficient under Green Office and requires records of other documents such as planning, operation and control documents.

- **Control of documents and operational control**

Procedures need to be established to control situations that might create significant environmental impacts. Procedures related to significant environmental impacts arising from the use of goods and services need to be communicated to suppliers where necessary.

- **Emergency preparedness and response**

Procedures to mitigate potential risks need to be defined and tested periodically.

Step 4 - Check and Act

- **Management review**

Management needs to review the entire EMS at planned intervals, including recommendations for improvement and need for changes.

Step 5 - External Recognition and Environmental Report

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

The role and tasks of an external auditor need to be sufficiently clarified. The certificate needs to be issued under one of the accreditation procedures recognised by the European Commission.

- **Environmental report/ statement**

EMAS requires that an environmental report is updated annually and made available to the public that includes a description of the organisation, environmental policy, environmental impacts, objectives and targets, summary of available data, reference to legal requirements, name or licence of environmental verifier and date of validation.