

ISO 14000 Standards Pathway to environmental progress

With the advancement of technology and man's exploitation of the environment the balance between man and the environment has been lost and this has paved the way for pollution of the environment. Realizing the damage done man himself had to seek measures to mitigate such pollution. As such global public concern about safeguarding and enhancing health and environmental quality has increased rapidly in the past two decades.

Reconciling economic development and environmental protection and demonstrating their fundamental complementarity are essential to achieve the global objectives set out at the Earth Summit held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

With a view to minimizing environmental pollution which was of global concern the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) established a Technical Committee TC 207 in 1993 to address environmental issues. ISO/TC 207 initiated the development of the ISO 14000 Series of Environmental Management System Standards. They are generic and therefore applicable in the agricultural, industrial and service sectors. Sri Lanka has the 'Participatory Member' (P member) status in ISO/TC 207 and Sri Lanka Standards Institution (SLSI) being the member body contribute by commenting on the Draft International Standards.

The objective of ISO 14000 is to establish a system to assess, monitor and manage environmental performance which can be used to promote continual environmental improvement and the prevention of pollution. Top management is encouraged to commit to the evaluation and improvement of a company's environ-

mental performance. It is left to individual enterprises to formulate their own policies, objectives and targets and introduce efficient processes geared to sustained improvement. The workforce at all levels is expected to play its part, sharing responsibilities and personal commitment in the company's enhanced environmental performance.

An organization would be certified against ISO 14001 - Environmental Management Systems - Specification with guidance for use. Others in the series which serve as guidelines include Standards for Environmental audit, Audit procedures, Qualification criteria for Environmental auditors, Environmental assessment of sites and organizations, Environmental labels and declarations - General principles, Environmental labels and declarations - Type I Environmental labelling - Guiding principles and procedures, Type II - Self declared environmental claims, Type III - Environmental labelling, Environmental performance evaluation, Life cycle analysis, Life cycle assessment and Information to assist forestry organizations in the use of environmental management systems ISO 14001 and ISO 14004.

There is also a ISO Guide (ISO guide 64: 1997) for the inclusion of Environmental Aspects in Product Standards. Some of these standards have been adopted as National Standards by SLSI.

ISO 14001 certification is designed to confer a huge marketing advantage on enterprises. Some of the benefits of certification are:

- * Minimization of waste leading to conservation of resources and increased profitability.

- * Providing effective tech-

nology development and transfer

- * Improving and maintaining the quality of the environment

- * Gaining an enhanced image and market share

- * Meeting customer's environmental expectations and at the same time maintain good public and community relations

- * Satisfying investor criteria which improves access to capital

- * Above all protect human health and the environment from the potential impacts of its activities, products and services

The key to sustainable industrial development lies in capitalizing on "win-win" situations that combine the twin objectives of industrial development and environmental protection. It is timely that the Sri Lankan industry considered going in for ISO 14001 certification which in no uncertain terms would be a marketing tool in the near future.

Development should be planned with sustainability in mind, or else the end result would be industrial development with a polluted environment with ill health on the other hand. SLSI has developed a number of general as well as industry specific standards for effluent discharges which has been gazetted by the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) which is the Regulatory Authority for the environment. Conforming to these standards would undoubtedly be a stepping stone to the industrialist who is aiming for ISO 14001 certification.

A concerted effort on the part of the government, business sector, industry associations and international agencies is required to ensure that industry can fulfill this role. Action should be taken to replace polluting technologies with cleaner

production processes that minimize pollution, encourage industrial innovation and research development efforts, encourage industry to conserve non-renewable and renewable resources through increased efficiency in production, recycling and conservation practices, address the special problems of the important and dynamic small and medium enterprises (SME) sector and also employ the 'Polluter pays' principle and install such waste water treatment plants.

The National Environmental Act No. 47 enacted in 1980 and amended in 1988 (Act No. 56) emphasizes the enhancement, regulation, maintenance, control of quality of the environment and control of pollution. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been made mandatory for major projects as categorized by the CEA. All these aims at minimizing pollution. It is timely that our Environmental Economists develop and implement a valuation system for our bio-diversity rich forests in terms of green economics.

It is the duty of every citizen in Sri Lanka to protect nature and conserve its riches states Article 28 (F) of the Constitution of Sri Lanka. This would be a reality if the industrialists and everybody else act in unison and protect and conserve what nature has given us in using it in a sustainable manner which would result in a green environment, leaving it for future generations too to enjoy and make it a pleasant place to live in.

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