



BY ROGER FROST

Editorial

Editorial

Child is father to the man

**The ISO-supported
Kids' ISO 14000
Programme is about
global citizenship and
addresses children
everywhere**

Will Superman swoop down and save the world?

The environment is rather a recent discovery as far as the business world is concerned. It's not so long ago that the business world dismissed environmentalists as "tree huggers" at best, dangerous lunatics at worst. Today, big business corporations would have you believe that they are among the environment's best friends. However, they haven't yet gone as far as claiming to have been responsible for the discovery of concern for the environment. In my book – in fact, in my comic book – that honour goes to Superman, if not in word, then certainly in spirit.

Many years ago, American comic books recounting the adventures of Superman used to include a public-interest advertisement, in the form of a comic strip, which had our hero communicating the message, "Keep your city/our country tidy!"

As I recall, the story line had two young boys dropping some litter on the front steps of their apartment block. Superman swoops down out of the sky and admonishes them. The boys protest that an itty bitsy piece of litter cannot do much harm – which brings the stern response from Superman, "What if everyone thought that way?" To demonstrate his point, he flies away and returns with a load of rubbish and dumps it, overflowing, on the steps. "See what I mean?" Shamefaced, they do. And they won't drop litter again. No, sir!

If I remember correctly, the comic strip was part of a US anti-litter campaign before the discovery of the environment, but the story nevertheless prefigured some of the environmental themes of today. Superman was giving the boys a lesson about cause and effect and about personal responsibility, plus a smattering of systems theory. Seemingly minor individual actions, when repeated on a broad scale, can build up to produce major impacts, even to a tip-over point – like the rubbish overflowing the steps – beyond which it is difficult to retrieve the original situation.

Global citizenship

The Superman comic strip was also about teaching American children good citizenship. Good citizenship is a component too of the ISO-supported **Kids' ISO 14000 Programme** (see pp. 9-10), although here it is about global citizenship and addresses children in all countries.

Children are, of course, on the menus of many businesses, photos of their smiling faces rendering digestible all sorts of corporate environmental sauces and mission statements about the importance of handing on a healthy world to coming generations. How many variants have you seen of the basic photo of a CEO

benignly handing a model Planet Earth to a grateful, beaming cherub? Cute? Or does it inspire nausea? Despite all the expressions of environmental goodwill, our planet still seems to be in danger of smothering under the weight of the negative impacts of industrial activity and the modern life style.

However, what is different about **The Kids' ISO 14000 Programme** is that children are not there just as bit players to sugarcoat someone's annual report – they play the leading roles. The programme begins by developing environmental awareness, but goes much further. What makes it special is its focus on developing autonomous, “environmentally mature” children and young people who are confident in their ability to act positively on the environment.

They learn by their own experience “on their own doorsteps” – in the family home and at their school – that their actions can have a beneficial impact on the environment. Then, they learn to network with children in other schools, communities and countries in order to discover that collective action and teamwork are force multipliers for resolving the challenges posed by global environmental issues.

The Kids' ISO 14000 Programme was launched in 2000 in Japan and is now being rolled out internationally with ISO's support. More than 50 000 Japanese school children have already participated, learning how to apply the ISO 14000 operating principle of **Plan-Do-Check-Act** to reduce energy and water consumption in their homes, and the amount of domestic rubbish produced.

What sorts of result are achieved? Reductions of carbon dioxide emissions by 10-15% per household have been demonstrated and environmental awareness among children increased by 80%. Environmental awareness also increased among 60% of family members of participating children, including parents. This revealed the effectiveness of environmental education of adults by their children (a finding which inspired the headline of this editorial and which is taken from the title of an album by the American musical group Blood, Sweat and Tears).

Side benefits

Interesting side benefits have also been recorded, such as increased and improved communication within the home resulting from the programme requirement for children to obtain the assistance and cooperation of their parents and other family members. This result has even prompted one Japanese city to try out the programme as part of its efforts to reduce crime by young offenders.

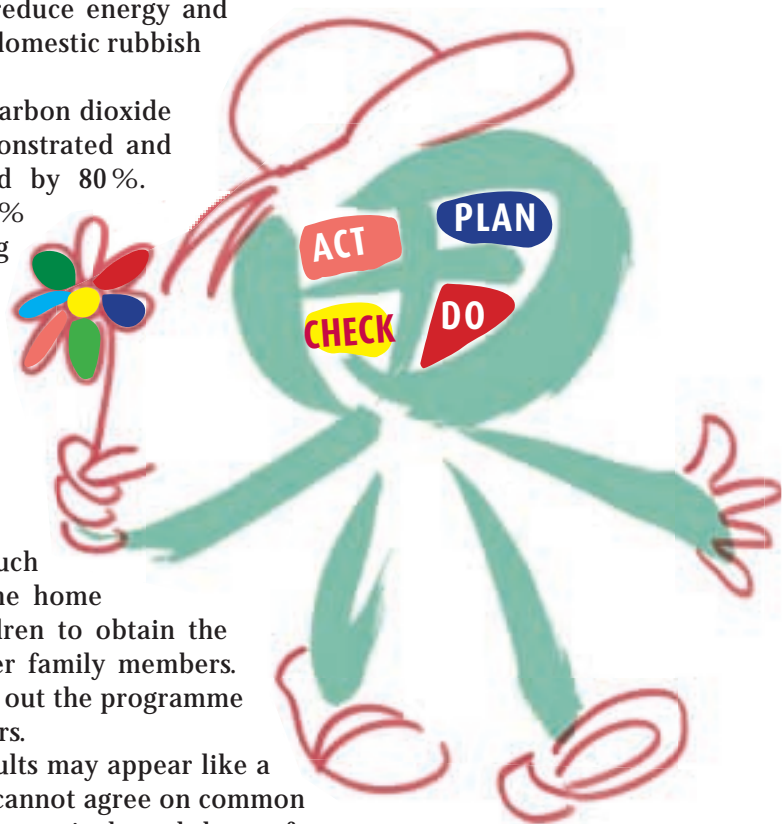
So what? Well, it's true that even such positive results may appear like a drop of pure water in a polluted ocean. Governments cannot agree on common action to tackle global warming, industries still pollute massively and those of us in developed countries avow concern for the environment, but have a hard time changing our environmentally naughty, but nice, life styles.

However, **The Kids' ISO 14000 Programme** is not just about the environment. It is also about helping children and young people to develop self-confidence, self-esteem and a positive belief in themselves and in their capacities to make a positive difference on the world around them. Parents and adults in general will recognize the importance of self-belief when facing challenges of any kind, in any sector of our lives.

In helping children to become confident, active adults, able to work in teams with others from other communities, countries and cultures, **The Kids' ISO 14000 Programme** offers the possibility of improving the environment in the very broadest sense of the word. As Superman said, “What if everyone thought that way?”

Will Superman swoop down and save the world? No, but our kids just might. Who was it said...it was the British rock group The Who and they didn't say it – they sang it: The Kids Are Alright!

The programme is also about helping young people to develop a positive belief in themselves and in their capacities



*ISO Management Systems' graphic artist Pascal Krieger created this illustration for the cover of ISO's brochure introducing **The Kids' ISO 14000 Programme**. Based on the Chinese and Japanese character symbolizing the world, or a circle, it also incorporates the **Plan-Do-Check-Act** cycle at the heart of the ISO 14000 standards.*