



# How to give your **ISO 14001 system** the climate change health check

by Matthias Gelber

*Notwithstanding the recent publication of ISO 14064 and ISO 14065, developed specifically for greenhouse gas accounting and verification, the author of this article argues that because ISO 14001 is already globally implemented, the environmental management system standard is potentially a powerful tool to mitigate climate change.*

## SPECIAL REPORT



As I sit here in Malaysia at my computer to write this article, I have already seen a couple of news flashes since this morning relevant to the subject which I am going to develop...

### Investors increasingly consider a lack of provision for carbon emission management as a risk

Malaysia, the country where I live, is starting to estimate the impact that rising sea levels would have on the country and in particular coastal regions. I guess the dramatic headlines from this report will make quite an impact on some local folk who might have not really have been giving this issue much credence in the past. When I think back to three years ago when I arrived in Malaysia, climate change was not really an issue – at least, not one that appeared in the news headlines.

I received an e-mail this morning from a global entrepreneur's network of which I am a member. The latest initiative will be to seek global buy-in from all countries to run a climate change initiative and to get involved in the Clinton Global Initiative.

Today, leaders and representatives of 150 countries are gathering to discuss global warming and how to combat it at the United Nations Assembly in New York. Chancellor Angela Merkel (the head of government of Germany, my own country of origin) and Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California, are just two of the

### About the author



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*Matthias, who is German, has comprehensive experience of helping a range of public and private sector clients with EMS implementation. In addition, he has held workshops and delivered presentations on EMS and climate change in some 36 countries worldwide.*

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huge number of prominent people present.

Things are happening! The latest reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have acted as a wake-up call and even previously reluctant politicians now seem to be championing the cause.

The film *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore and currently *The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour* by Leonardo DiCaprio are reaching out to a world-

wide audience that pays attention when the message comes from Hollywood.

Business in parts of the world has been challenged by carbon emission trading and questions from shareholders or customers with regard to how carbon risks and opportunities are being managed. Investors in particular increasingly consider a lack of carbon emission management provision as a risk for companies' shareholder value in the long term.

### Personal commitment

We are all challenged to make our contribution at a personal level and a business level. Therefore, may I start off by asking what you are doing at your personal level? As for myself, here are some practical actions that I take (not to be misunderstood as an attempt to show off, but rather as an attempt to give concrete examples):

- taking public transport rather than a car where feasible (I do not own a car, nor do I have a company car);
- using a ventilator fan rather than air conditioning at night (it is hot in Malaysia, but a fan is much more eco-efficient than air conditioning);
- using eco-efficient light bulbs;
- taking a shower with unheated water;
- undertaking carbon-capturing business ventures, such as reforestation;
- giving numerous talks on the subject to businesses, universities, schools etc.;

- frequently working from home;
- buying a carbon-free life credit from [www.plant-a-tree-today.org](http://www.plant-a-tree-today.org)
- planting more trees.

What contribution are you are making on a personal level?

### Organizational commitment

Now, I want to shift over to the organizational level.

Many of you readers of *ISO Management Systems* will either manage an ISO 14001 system in your organization, might provide consultancy on the standard, may be engaged on related research, or may provide third party ISO 14001 certification.

### We are all challenged to make our contribution at a personal level and a business level

Some of you will also be familiar with ISO 14064, which is concerned with greenhouse gas emissions data inventory for organizations, projects and the relevant verification and validation of the data, and with ISO 14065 for the accreditation of organizations providing greenhouse gas verification services.

This article will not focus on ISO 14064 and ISO 14065, but rather look at how an existing ISO 14001 environmental system can help mitigate climate change. The rationale for this is that the diffusion of ISO

14001 is already rather comprehensive.

Latest figures from Reinhard Peglau, senior scientific officer for environmental management in the German Environment Agency suggests that there were around 130000 ISO14001 certificates by early 2007. These figures rely on voluntary data provision and present the most comprehensive data that is available. This is a significant uptake as there are as well a lot of very large multinational organizations within this total.

I believe in making use of existing systems if they work well, rather than creating a whole new structure to run a new challenge. I have seen a lot of organizations struggle from having too many separate and disjointed initiatives confusing their employees. Carbon emission or greenhouse gas (GHG) management is essentially an environmental challenge. Therefore, ISO 14001 should fit the bill as an appropriate vehicle to help drive GHG-related improvements.

### Three criteria

All of us should have an interest in making environmental management systems (EMS) work for their intended purpose! But what exactly do I mean by an ISO 14001 system that works well?

Essentially, I propose that you apply these three criteria to your organization:

**1.** Is your ISO 14001 system improving your environmental performance at a measurable level?

**2.** Is your ISO 14001 system making it easier for your organization to manage environmental threats and opportunities?

**3.** Is your ISO 14001 system adding business value to your organization? Business value can cover issues such as saving money, gaining credibility, limiting risks, identifying product or service innovation opportunities.....

If you can say “yes” to the above, then you are on the right track. If your answer is “no” to most of the questions

above, then it is likely that you only implemented ISO 14001 for the certification “badge”, or that top management commitment is lacking. In these cases, your system is unlikely to be a good starting point for helping your organization to manage your climate change challenges.

You might want to consider giving your system a serious facelift first! Rather than reading the rest of this article, you might do better to look read some of the many successful implementation case study articles that *ISO Management Systems* has published over the

years, or to seek advice on how to make your system work better, or on how to change the attitude of senior and middle management towards the system.

### ‘Climate change health check’

For those of you who are comfortable that your EMS is truly working in line with the intention of continual improvement, let us look at where the direct links are and what actions you can take to give your ISO14001 system the “climate change health check”. Please note that I will focus on those aspects of ISO 14001 which I think have the most direct link, rather than listing each major requirement of ISO 14001.

#### • *Environmental policy*

This is all about the framework, commitment and direction that you are taking as an organization with regard to managing your environmental aspects and impacts. Continual improvement and prevention of pollution are part of it.

Review whether you want to include reference to climate change in your policy. Review whether continual improvement and prevention of GHG emissions is effectively being delivered through your ISO 14001 system

#### • *Environmental aspects*

ISO14001 asks you to prioritize your aspects based on the actual or potential impact. It can be a positive or negative impact. In order to evaluate properly

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aspects and impacts, it is important that you have an idea of the scale of the impact.

Review your criteria for prioritization of significant environmental aspects. Do they properly take account of negative impacts of GHG emissions? Look at the list of your significant environmental aspects. Are your major sources of GHG included in there?

To obtain an idea of the scale of your GHG impacts, it would be useful for you to make an inventory of your GHG emissions. Please note the link here to monitoring and measuring aspects of your EMS. There are some useful free tools on the Web to help you with the inventory and aggregation of your GHG emissions.

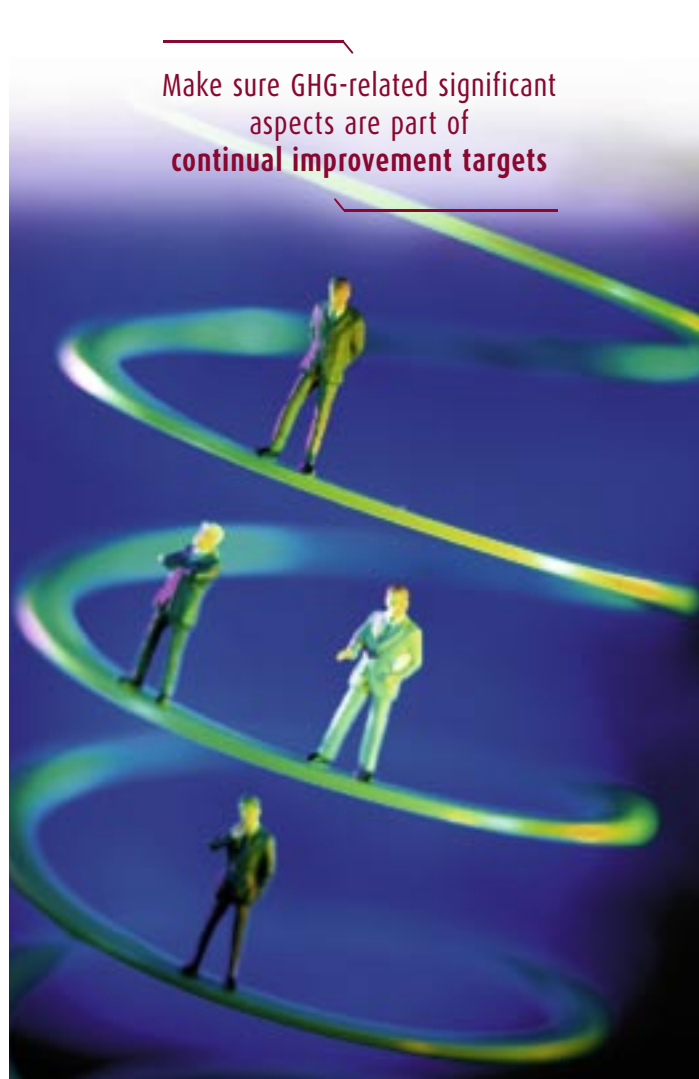
### • *Legal and other requirements*

Often “other” requirements in this context are less well understood. If you are required to address GHG issues as part of a corporate commitment, or a requirement from your customer, or part of a regional agreement, then this should be part of your EMS.

Review whether such other requirements regarding GHG emissions exist and build them into your EMS.

### • *Objectives, targets and programme(s)*

Here the link will be obvious. Make sure that your GHG-related significant aspects are truly part of your continual improvement targets and pro-



Make sure GHG-related significant aspects are part of continual improvement targets

grammes. It can help if organization brands those areas under the umbrella of your climate change commitments or programme

### • *Resources, roles, responsibility and authority*

The resources are the those needed to make the programmes successful and include both human and financial resources. Investment in the right energy, natural resources and in increasing fuel efficiency will provide returns on investment and lower your car-

bon footprint. I advise you to go for the investments with a long-term horizon. It will be good for your business – and for future generations!

### • *Competency, training and awareness*

Some companies have used the issue of climate change as an internal and external awareness, training and communication opportunity. Everyone can relate to climate change. Sometimes staff members may feel that they have no part to play in the organization’s EMS which they consider there only

to deal with highly regulated areas in the business, and not with issues such as energy efficiency in offices.

However, everyone can contribute to doing something in the organization to lower its carbon footprint. This might be an opportunity to inject new focus and purpose into operating the EMS, particularly some years after certification when a certain amount of lethargy that may have set in. Make the link as well to the internal and external communication aspects of your EMS. Without it, such an initiative will not work!

### • *Operational control*

Here, there a lot of opportunities awaiting your organization, such as controlling its processes effectively to minimize energy and fuel consumption. Even steps as simple as ensuring that lights and electronic devices are switched off at appropriate times will contribute benefits, as well as getting people involved.

Proper communication and awareness will make this a task that people will be willing and proud to do, rather than something that is considered to be extra red tape!

### • *Monitoring and measuring*

Make sure you do this one properly! Read again my comments under aspects and impacts. Too many EMS are not properly focused or accountable because monitoring and measuring is neglected. How

are you going to manage your GHG risks and opportunities properly if you do not even know about the scale of the issue within your organization?

An important aspect for you to consider is that a large part of your carbon footprint might be generated by your suppliers, by the distribution of your products, or by their use. If yours is a service organization, then often your service could gain competitive advantage by helping your customers gain the results they desire – but with a lower carbon footprint. Make use of such opportunities for your organization!

#### • *Internal audit*

Why not run your next internal audit in a different way by not just using the same old systems check lists, but by focusing on a specific theme like GHG emissions? Audits run the danger of becoming a routine that is conducted without management expecting too much value from them. The focus on a specific theme like GHG emission can inject some innovation and new interest!

#### • *Management review*

Even though this is the final element in the ISO 14001 structure, it is perhaps the place where you should start. You might want to table the issue of climate change under the theme of “changing circumstances” which the text of ISO 14001 refers to *Management Review*.

Use it as an opportunity to educate and challenge your senior management. Bring in the theme of future generations – “what about their kids?” What about the brand of the company? How does the company want make a its contribution to meeting a global challenge that is already without a doubt an issue relevant to our long term survival as the human species?

I wish you courage and focus in your efforts to reduce your own personal carbon footprint and to optimize the use of your organization’s ISO 14001 sys-

tem to combat climate change – your children and the children of this world will be proud of you! Please check out:

**[www.fightglobalwarming.com/viewads.cfm](http://www.fightglobalwarming.com/viewads.cfm)**

- In the next issue of *ISO Management Systems*, I will report on some examples of how pro-active companies are acting to deal with climate change.

**ISO 14001**  
and climate change

