

WORLD WIDE GUIDE

Although consensual international business standards for environmental management are still evolving, governments around the globe are beginning to view the ISO 14001 as an idea whose time has come.

ISO 14001 — like any number of common-sense ideas — took too long to articulate, sounds pretentious and unnecessarily confuses just about everyone. But ISO 14001 is a business and environmental development that corporate managers and their lawyers will use and talk about for years to come.

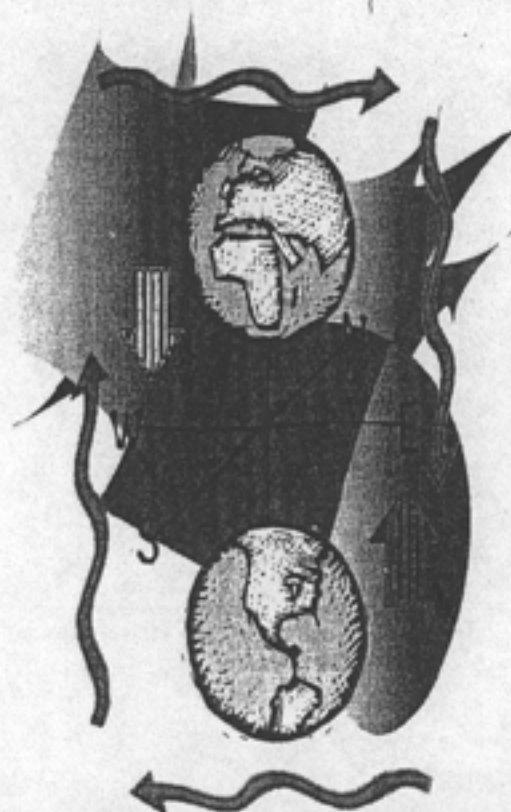
In September 1996, after five years of discussion, the International Organization for Standardization, based in Geneva, Switzerland, issued ISO 14001, the first and most generic in a series of consensual international business standards for environmental management. Already, ISO 14001 is the subject of numerous articles and several books.

Despite its user-unfriendly full title — "Environmental Management Systems: Specification With Guidance for Use" — ISO 14001 does spell out a thoughtful and usable way for companies to set up an EMS, a disciplined comprehensive environmental management system or program tailored to the needs of the company and integrated into all aspects of its operations.

An EMS helps companies and organizations establish and achieve three overall goals: regulatory compliance, internal policy goals and continual environmental improvement. An obvious by-product of an EMS is increased credibility with customers, consumers and regulatory authorities.

The term "ISO" itself has caused a fair amount of confusion. ISO, generally thought of as an abbreviation for the International Organization for Standardization, is not new. It was founded in Switzerland shortly after World War II in order to encourage international harmonization in standards for manufacturing products and communications. Since the late 1940s, over 8,000 internationally accepted standards have been issued, ranging from weights and measures to camera speeds and paper sizes.

Contrary to what many believe, ISO is not affiliated with the United Nations or any formal European alliance. It now has approximately 120 voting mem-



ber bodies, or countries. The American member is the American National Standards Institute, founded as a national safety organization in 1918, and based in New York City.

Although now generally identified as the International Organization for Standards, ISO is really not even an acronym for this entity. It comes from the Greek word for "equal." This connotes the whole idea of ISO 14001 pretty succinctly. ISO is not so much an organization as it is a concept of voluntary private-sector standards to be used internationally.

The ISO 14000 series in part was inspired by ISO 9000, the popular consensual "quality management" system that helped fuel the quality-control revolution of the 1980s led by Edwards Deming, Warren Bennis and Stephen Covey. Spurred by the momentum toward global markets and international trade agreements, ISO 9000 focuses primarily on product quality and meeting customer requirements.

ISO 14000, the environmental standard series, like its forerunner, has been characterized as everything from a storybook example of international cooperation toward creation of a new age "green" economy to a conspiracy of certain North American and European companies seeking pre-emptively to write their own international environmental law. The truth is somewhere in the middle.

In fact, a lot of the impetus and enthusiasm for the ISO 14000 idea came from the so-called 1992 Earth Summit of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil (where in the summer of 1992, 100 countries agreed on the need for international environmental standards), the Montreal Protocol and certain environmental aspects of the North American Free Trade Agreement. These developments all had a diverse range of authors and participants, often concerned with cross-border pollution issues.

ISO 14001's emphasis is on a preventive rather than after-the-fact orienta-