



Chapter I

EPE According to ISO 14031: Concept, Experience, and Revision Issues

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Abstract

ISO 14031 on “Environmental Performance Evaluation” (EPE) was released in late 1999 and published in Germany by DIN in early 2000 also as DIN EN ISO 14031 in two languages (German and English) as the last standard of the original ISO-14000 family started in 1993 as a follow-up to the UN world summit in Rio 1992. But even before 1999/2000 users had already begun gathering experience with this new instrument for measuring performance, which had proven the standard to be an effective instrument especially for small-to-medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) both for continual improvement processes in operative environmental protection and as a basis for lean reporting to external stakeholders. Once again it was the ecological pioneer KUNERT AG which became the first mover to practically apply and test the standard with a view to improving it in view of the first revision process of the standard planned for 2004.

Historical Development

“Environmental Performance Evaluation” (EPE) was one of the original five main areas for a ISO 14000 series which had been set up by ISO Geneva in connection with the Rio Summit in 1992 as a measure to “strengthen the role of business” in the Agenda 21 process (Seifert 1998a, p. 27): A Subcommittee 4 (SC4) was set up to develop an EPE standard in 1993 in addition to standards for environmental management systems, corresponding auditing procedures, product labeling and Life Cycle Analysis (LCA). The USA got the chair and secretary of SC 4 along with convenorship of one of the two working groups (WG) on an “EPE of the management area”. A second WG convenorship on an “EPE of the operational area” was given to Norway, which was especially active in the time thereafter in important stations of the development of ISO 14031 (Seifert, 1998b).

Dividing the management of the standardization process into these two areas indicates differences in the philosophy applied to the ISO process, which have been referred to as the Anglo-Saxon versus the Rhine model (as discussed further below), and comprises one of the reasons that the development of this new standard took around six years, whereas the flagship of the whole series, ISO 14001, took only half as long. The international drafters of this new standard had to try a new approach to get to a first draft with official status. From 1993 to the beginning of 1996 drafting committees consisting of SC4 members needed a total of four working drafts (WDs) before the SC head laid the foundation with two other WDs it had come up with for the next stage consisting of two subsequent committee drafts (up to the end of 1997), which attained preliminary official status: an English version can be obtained from national standard institutions and one can work with it. It took another two years for ISO 14031 to accomplish the next two main stages, that is, becoming a DIS (draft international standard) and an FDIS (final DIS), and to obtain final approval and publication – thus reflecting the pioneering task of this ISO subcommittee.

Philosophy and a Few Main Points on ISO 14031

As mentioned above, ISO 14031 represents a significant change in philosophy compared to the flagship 14000 series: Whereas the definition of environmental performance in ISO 14001 primarily has to do with improving the environmental management system, the consciously different definition of SC4 aims at the

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