

What next with EMAS? Conclusions of a longitudinal Analysis from 1997 to 2002

Abstract

Germany was and still is leading in EMAS registrations in absolute figures as well as in relation to habitants. But since three years the number of EMAS registrations is falling back against ISO 14001 in Germany. Internationally EMAS already has lost the race against ISO 14001 long ago. Now, there are about 70.000 ISO verifications globally and 33.000 in the EU and only 4.000 Sites with EMAS environmental management systems.

Over six years, the authors have carried out a longitudinal analysis of 30 companies who had an EMAS management system in 1997. At the end of the term in 2002 more than half of the companies had left the EMAS scheme either to turn to ISO (13 companies) or to completely go without any external auditing of their environmental management system. This analysis as well as results of other research and discussions with experts led to several conclusions, which are relevant to develop the future policy on environmental management systems:

It turns out, that EMAS is not necessarily a safe indicator for premium environmental management. There are also some ISO 14001 certified companies which perform above average even though there are still more EMAS participants in this group.

There is a decline in the marginal benefits of EMAS as well as of ISO 14001 audits. As the internal effort and the expenditures to maintain an EMAS or ISO 14001 management system remain the same, the cost benefit ratio gets worse.

Now even in Germany it no longer seems to be possible to maintain a large number of EMAS verified companies on the long run.

Therefore environmental policy should abandon to back up EMAS against ISO 14001. Instead EMAS's heritage, the advantages of the system to ISO 14001 should be safeguarded. Part of these advantages are the double compliance check, a public register of certified firms and eventually a modernised EMAS statement for large companies.

Environmental management and environmental management systems are often the nucleus for sustainability management. In the perspective of CSR, environmental management is a prerequisite to provide voluntarily environmental performance, hence contributions to environmental CSR. In order to save the heritage of EMAS a voluntary agreement between business and the environmental administration should be set up.

Comments are welcome and will be published at www.4sustainability.org

Abstract taken from:

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