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ISO and the environment

“Think globally, act locally” – the well-known credo for addressing environmental issues – also expresses the objective of ISO’s many environmental standards. These standards reflect global consensus on good environmental practice in the international context that can be applied pragmatically by organizations all over the world in their particular situation.

ISO has a two-pronged approach to meeting the needs of all stakeholders from business, industry, governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations, as well as consumers, in the field of the environment.

Firstly, ISO offers a wide-ranging portfolio of standards for sampling and test methods to deal with specific environmental challenges. It has developed more than 350 International Standards for the monitoring of such aspects as the quality of air, water and soil, as well as noise and radiation. They also serve in a number of countries as the technical basis for environmental regulations.

Secondly, ISO has developed standards that help organizations to take a more pro-active approach to managing environmental issues. These environmental management standards can be implemented in any type of organizations in either public or private sectors (from companies to administrations to public utilities).

To spearhead this strategic approach, ISO established a new technical committee, ISO/TC 207 in 1993, *Environmental management*. This move was a concrete manifestation of ISO's commitment to respond to the complex challenge of "sustainable development" articulated at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro. It also stemmed from an intensive consultation process, carried out within the framework of the Strategic Advisory Group on Environment (SAGE). SAGE was set up in 1991 and brought together representatives of a variety of countries and international organizations – a total of more than 100 environmental experts – who helped to define how International Standards could support better environmental management.

As a result, the ISO 14000 family of standards on environmental management was developed to provide a practical toolbox to assist in the implementation of actions supportive to sustainable development.

Today, national delegations of environmental experts from 66 countries participate within ISO/TC 207, including 27 developing countries. In addition, 35 international non-governmental and business organizations participate as liaison organizations. The national delegations are chosen by the national standards institute concerned and they are required to bring to ISO/TC 207 a national consensus on issues being addressed by the technical committee. This national consensus is derived from a process of consultation with interested parties in each country.

From its beginning, it was recognized that ISO/TC 207 should cooperate closely with ISO/TC 176, *Quality management and quality assurance* – the ISO technical committee responsible for the ISO 9000 family of quality management standards – in the areas of management systems, auditing and related terminology. Successful steps have been taken to ensure compatibility of ISO environmental management and quality management standards. These include a common standard giving guidelines for environmental and/or quality auditing.

