



## **Managing Your Sustainability**

### *Environmental Audit*

#### **Mark Yoxon:**

An environmental audit in many ways is the nervous system. Like we have a nervous system in our body that tells us what's going on. So an environmental audit is thinking. 'Well, what did we set out to do in our own systems?'

So in a sense what we're trying to do is reduce pollution in ways that make sense to the business and, and then manage those things. And so the environmental audit is saying, 'Well this is what we set out to do. Are we doing this or not? If not, why not? Where are the system failures if, if we do have system failures?' So it's those kind of nervous system feedback loops that then say, 'We're doing really, really well. We're conforming to what we set ourselves in our system. And we're conforming perhaps to the environmental management systems like ISO14001 because having the certificate is really important to our business because our customer supplies, whatever, are demanding that of us'.

In an ideal world, and if I'm looking at as a kind of very optimistic environmental auditor, it's being driven by the companies themselves. Because they say we've made a commitment to reduce pollution in ways that makes sense to our business. Obviously, realities are a little different and there are other pressures on the organisation or the business. One of those, and a biggy, is environmental legislation. Because the law says that you need to be doing things in this particular way and if you don't the regulator potentially can knock on your door and say, you know, 'You shouldn't be doing that, either close your business or sort it out' and whatever.

For me it's really important that environmental audits are done. And I think otherwise it's, you, ok, an organisation might make some green claims and say, look, look at us, we're environmentally brilliant. The audit's going to provide the objective evidence to say whether they are or aren't doing those things. So it substantiates it in a very fundamental way.

An environmental audit is usually carried out by an environmental professional who would...so the environmental management representative, the environment manager, whatever they might be called. So that person would have the education background and also some training in auditing tools and techniques to be able to carry out the auditing.

There's three kinds of auditing. There's first party auditing where you're doing it to yourself. We've set a system up, is it working or not? We really need to understand. So we, we, it's a very inward looking process.

Second party auditing would be: we need to go to our suppliers, for instance, because potentially suppliers of goods and services might expose us to risk. Might expose us to environmental bad practice. So we need to look at them to see that they're aligned with what we've committed to do through our environmental policy.

And then the third party auditing is kind of a step back. So it would be an organisation like British Standards Institution, Lloyds Register, DMV. There's about 29 organisations in the UK that are accredited by UKAS, the United Kingdom Accreditation Service

To carry out an environmental audit there are four sets of activities. One of them is about managing the audit process itself: making sure you've got the team in place; making sure you've got the interviews set up; making sure that you understand the objectives and targets of the organisation set itself, you know. In a sense, although the international standard says there doesn't have to be an environmental management kind of handbook, I've never yet worked with an organisation that doesn't have one. So it's about really getting to grips with that. I suppose that's in a sense the good intentions that the organisations had.

Then the second step is to, having understood the system, is to begin to collect the evidence and say, 'You said you'll deal with it: you said you'd reduce waste; you'll divert waste from landfill; you'll look at how you get goods and services in'. Really beginning to collect that evidence. So that's the second step.

And the third step is, having gathered that objective evidence about what's going on, is to make sense of that evidence and begin to kind of shuffle it around. Because you might, in a large organisation, you might have a team of, I don't know, three, four, five internal auditors who are all doing different parts of the business. Somebody might be looking at the paperwork; somebody might be talking to suppliers and contractors; somebody might be talking with staff, carrying out interviews; somebody might be looking at how things actually operate on-site: where the drainage points are, where the skips are kept, so on and so forth.

And then the fourth and final step is, having gone through all the quite rigorous work, is to say, 'Well, what action do we need to take to change things?' It might be that everything's perfect. Although my experience says that there's always something that you can do to improve the environmental performance.

I think if you're doing an environmental audit there are a number of things you really need to focus on. You really need to focus on what is it the organisation does? And it might be a manufacturing industry, it might be a service industry, it might be a local authority office environment. What do they do? What's coming in? What's going out? Where do they use the energy? Where's the waste being generating? So it's having that big picture and I would often say to people - if I'm helping train auditors, which I've done on a number of occasions - is to map, literally map it out. Make a picture if that is the way you do things. Make a picture of stuff coming in, things happening to it, stuff going out. So you've really got that picture of the business.

And then think, 'Well, now that I know what the business is, what are its significant environmental issues? What's going on? Is it using lots of energy? Is it a transport business using lots of transport fuel? And servicing vehicles? Is it a manufacturing industry using lots of raw materials and lots of energy? Is it, you know, a high street bank which has got different things going on and, and interaction with customers?' Or whatever.

So really get your head round that. And then begin to think, 'Well, what do we, what is the organisation doing to do to manage its significant environmental issues? Is it addressing those or not? And if not, why not?' And really start to collect objective evidence. And I would say to people, you know, imagine that you, a few days down the line having finished the audit have got to stand up and give a presentation to senior management of the company and in a sense people feel that sometimes the environment or auditing is the green police.