

Abstract

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The aim of this study is to explore and analyse the diffusion, implementation and reach of environmental management systems, with special focus on local conditions and activities resulting in environmental improvement. The study covers development of environmental management systems in Sweden, focusing on the environmental work of companies and organisations, in particular, with respect to the environmental management system (ISO 14001). As an introduction, an extensive study will explore and analyse the spread of environmental certificates in a comprehensive geographical and business sector perspective during 1995-2000. Then follows (The second part of the study is) a process-oriented case study which examines and analyses how an environmental management system is introduced to a company within the manufacturing industry in Västra Götaland and how it is gradually implemented at one of its factories in Falköping during 1999-2005.

Beginning with employment rate, initially, it is the larger companies that are the most prominent in certifying parts of, or the whole of, the enterprise. A noticeable diffusion and growth of the number of certificates takes place while the development concentrates more on certain branches. Thus, the production industry dominates the statistics, with manufacturing particularly distinguishing itself. In other sectors, retailing and other business related services stand out.

The case study shows that implementation of an environmental management system in a company stimulates a prolonged process where local operators play significant roles. The company renders energy and material flows more efficiently and decreases its emission rates. The environmental management system proves to be a very successful concept for the company, but the achievements seem to be so satisfying that continued progression risks to tail off. After an initial focus on local and internal activity processes, and visible and relatively simple environmental problems, the focus turns towards other parts of the production system which may be more difficult to deal with - for instance transports and input goods. The environmental management system clearly creates a spirit of environmental thinking that goes beyond the frameworks of the ISO 14001-standard. It leads to activities and actions within areas that, from the start, were not expected to be affected by the environmental management system.

Keywords: environmental management systems, iso 14001, eco-management and audit scheme (emas), environmental certification, certificate, environmental tool, administrative steering tool, processes, material flows, communicative actions, time geography.

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