

ISO 20121

Business as usual within the events industry can't continue. Our industry can't keep producing mountain ranges of rubbish, or leave clouds of CO2 in legacy. No matter the type of event, every coming together of people for a purpose can be done so with consideration for sustainability.

The introduction of the new international standard, ISO 20121: Event Sustainability Management Systems will see our industry transition from ad-hoc or narrow focus on individual 'greening' elements of an event, to a comprehensive and systematic approach to embedding sustainability into our event planning cycle.

ISO 20121 has been in development for a couple of years now and is about to go out as a draft international standard for public comment. The standard has been developed off the back of the BS8901 standard in the UK. Countries all around the world have participated in developing the standard. Enquire if your country's standards body has been involved and how you can add your comment to the draft standard.

Once it's launched, what does that mean for your event? If you're currently addressing some sustainability issues, implementing the standard sets you up to have the systems, skills and requirements to facilitate successful and comprehensive management of sustainable development issues associated with your event. It is likely the standard will quickly become minimum must-take for events if publically funded or for events funded by corporations who have constituents they need report CSR performance to. It is also likely to become common practice across the entire event industry over time.

A management system is not a scary proposition to implement. If you are methodical in your planning for event logistics, then you will find it a simple process to implement the ISO 20121.

So how to implement the standard? The steps are cyclical, and include the following; set the scope or boundaries of the event organisation and its activities (what the management system is going to cover); identify interested parties (stakeholders); identify and understand your issues and potential impacts and legacies and set plans in place to manage them. Feed back through the stakeholders to communicate and engage them and get a good handle on potential issues. You set performance objectives and goals.

Important during the initial phase is that the organisation formalize its commitment to sustainable development principles and sets down a declaration about this. Developing policies to guide the successful implementation of these principles is also an important step. Top management of the organisation must commit to implementing the management system and also to supporting it in resources including time, skills, knowledge and possibly budget allocation. Top management must also commit to requesting a management review and to working towards continual improvement.

In amongst the system is ensuring the team members have the skills and knowledge to understand sustainability and imple-

ment the management system. This may take inductions and training, professional development courses, hiring new people or engaging consultants to guide you through and teach the team at the same time.

Finally, thorough documentation must be kept, and results measured. The results and performance is of course fed back in a review cycle and objectives set for continual improvement.

What about certification? This is an interesting question. ISO 20121 can be first, second or third party certified. First party is where you self-declare compliance. You believe you have tracked through the system and kept relevant documentation, and performed successfully. Next is Second party, where you allow an independent external party to review your documentation, systems and performance, and they declare you compliant. Finally is Third party, and this is where an auditing company officially accredited through your national standard's body, independently assesses your systems, documentation and performance.

Time will tell how the industry progresses to third party certification. The challenge will be the required competencies in auditors to have the skills and knowledge in management systems, auditing, sustainable development and its application in the event industry. I believe we will transition to third party certification after about five years, but first and second party will be most popular during the initial roll out of the standard.

Tools are also available to electronically document the management system so keep an eye out for those as they enter the market.

Now is the time to get your house in order, get your systems in place, documentation formalized and staff trained. Then you'll be ready to press go as soon as the standard is launched! In the meantime, take a peek at it and add your comments when the draft is published for public comment.

Meegan Jones is an event professional focusing her work on developing sustainable management solutions for live events. She is the President of Sustainable Event Alliance; Author of "Sustainable Event Management: A Practice Guide"; Director of GreenShoot Pacific; and Head of the Australian Delegation of ISO 20121.

Sustainable Event Alliance - www.sustainable-event-alliance.com
Sustainable Event Management:

A Practical Guide - www.thegreeneventguide.com

GreenShoot Pacific - www.greenshootpacific.com

She can be reached at: meegan@greenshootpacific.com