

Questions and Answers on the Revision of the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS)

1) What is EMAS?

EMAS, the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme, is a voluntary scheme which is designed to recognise and reward proactive organisations that go beyond what environmental laws expect of them and that are constantly improving the way they interact with the environment.

Once an organisation has proved that it is improving its environmental performance according to set objectives, as verified by an independent body, it can begin using the EMAS logo. The logo is not only proof that the organisation has set up a strict programme of environmental performance improvements, but also that it respects existing environmental legislation and that its employees play a key role in the process.

EMAS came into force in 1995. In the beginning it was limited to companies in the industrial sector but the scheme's scope was widened its scope in 2001¹ to include public and private service providers as well as public sector organisations.



2) What are the benefits of EMAS?

As well as showing commitment to protecting the environment, which can improve their public image, organisations participating in EMAS achieve a better overall management of their activities. This often enables them to save money by reducing their consumption of resources and materials, such as energy, water and paper, and their generation of waste.

The most common benefits of EMAS implementation are:

- Reduced costs, namely in the purchasing process through minimising materials, energy consumption, water consumption and other business resources, in turn raising companies' profit margins.
- Reduced environmental risks, which can also turn into financial benefits resulting from trust by shareholders, investment companies, insurance companies and financial institutions

¹ Regulation (EC) No 761/2001

- Maintained and/or increased competitiveness by being able to satisfy the environmental management requirements of a growing number of customers
- Improved ability to comply with environmental legislation
- Greater credibility - the EMAS logo and the verified environmental statement are proof of sound environmental management and concern for the general welfare of the community
- Increased staff commitment - the involvement of employees in the implementation of the environmental management scheme is likely to reinforce the identification of staff with the company and increase their participation in the long-term development of the organisation

3) How does EMAS work?

EMAS is open to any organisation that is dedicated to improving its environmental performance. The scheme does not prescribe how and by how much an organisation should do so. EMAS is flexible in that organisations assess their own capabilities and set their own goals for improvement. In defining these goals the organisation is helped by an external verifier to make sure it sets realistic targets. To become registered with EMAS an organisation must take the following steps:

- Conduct an **environmental review** of all its activities and assess them against existing environmental laws;
- Establish an **environmental management system** setting out its environment objectives and the means to achieve these objectives;
- Carry out an internal **environmental audit** assessing the management system in place and compliance with relevant environmental regulatory requirements;
- Provide a **statement** outlining its environmental policy, programme and management system, and summarising its environmental performance with the results achieved and the steps necessary for future improvements.

The environmental review, management system, audit, and statement must be approved by an accredited verifier and sent to the appropriate competent body for registration. The environmental statement must be made public before an organisation is allowed to use the EMAS logo.

4) Why is the scheme being revised?

EMAS now has more than 6,000 sites registered in a wide range of economic sectors, but this number is not as high as it could be, given the millions of organisations throughout the EU. The aim of revising EMAS is to increase participation and encourage more organisations to commit to improving their environmental performance. The objective is to turn EMAS into the best indicator to measure improvements in environmental performance and compliance with environmental legislation.

Nearly all organisations that have taken part in the scheme have significantly improved their environmental performance and most of these consider that the benefits of joining EMAS far outweigh the investments needed to set up the system. This sometimes involves important changes within the organisation and also requires staff to be mobilised and the services of environmental consultants and auditors.

5) How will the scheme change?

The scheme will remain essentially voluntary and EMAS will continue to be based on a standard environmental management system, as embodied in the ISO 14001 standard.

In addition, there will be elements strengthening the obligation to comply with the system and reinforced environmental reporting, using core performance indicators to report on energy efficiency, material efficiency, water, waste emissions and biodiversity. A system of reference documents, on a sectoral basis, will be developed to promote best practice in environmental management.

The fact that the benefits of EMAS outweigh the investment involved in implementing it has not always been clear to organisations. The Commission's proposal seeks to make the scheme more attractive to organisations and to make its benefits for the environment and the organisation itself clearer. The aim is to increase the participation of companies and reduce the administrative burden and costs to SMEs (small and medium sized enterprises).

The measures to improve EMAS proposed by the Commission include:

- Greater promotion and support for EMAS by Member States and EU institutions to increase awareness of its benefits among organisations and citizens. This includes: financial support; fiscal measures; registration subsidies or tax breaks for registered organisations; longer permit validity and less frequent inspections by environmental enforcement agencies of EMAS-registered companies
- A harmonised system throughout the European Union with a single set of rules
- Extending EMAS to the rest of the world so that companies can use EMAS in their contacts with non-EU organisations
- Making use of the EMAS logo easier and allowing it to be more widely used
- Simplifying the legislation to make it easier to understand how the scheme works and what the obligations of EMAS participation are

6) Why is there need for action at EU level?

Organisations, especially those in the private sector, have activities that often extend far beyond national or EU borders. Action is thus taken at EU level to provide organisations with one harmonised system applicable throughout the European Union. Non-EU organisations will also be able to participate in EMAS.

7) When will these proposals take effect?

It is expected that a revised EMAS regulation will be adopted in 2009 and will enter into force at the beginning of 2010.

Key EMAS figures

	Participating organisations	Registered sites
Austria	255	499
Belgium	45	350
Bulgaria	0	0
Cyprus	4	4
Czech Republic	32	32
Denmark	96	239
Estonia	2	2
Finland	42	49
France	12	12
Germany	1436	1879
Greece	60	60
Hungary	17	19
Ireland	6	6
Italy	834	1183
Latvia	8	13
Lithuania	0	0
Luxembourg	1	1
Malta	1	1
Netherlands	10	16
Norway	24	24
Poland	10	10
Portugal	69	74
Romania	1	1
Slovak Republic	5	5
Slovenia	1	1
Spain	981	1198
Sweden	74	75
United Kingdom	69	366
TOTAL	4095	6119

Industrial sector

	Registrations
Food and beverages	273
Chemicals	262
Fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment	257
Electricity, gas, steam and hot water supply	227
Recycling	162

Service sector

	Registrations
Sewage and refuse disposal	284
Hotels and restaurants	241
Public authorities	316
Education	148
Other business activities	198

More information on EMAS can be found at the following website:
<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/>