



Environmental management: A key driver for ACO in reducing costs and increasing efficiency and profits

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Richard Hill
Managing Director, ACO

Customer needs

- To demonstrate compliance with high environmental standards
- To comply with legislation
- To have independent auditing

Customer benefits

- Improved relations with suppliers and customers
- Reduced costs
- Improved efficiency
- Understanding of environmental implications
- Better understanding of best practice
- Clearly defined goals and objectives

Customer background

ACO is the world market leader in the design, development and manufacture of surface water drainage. ACO has an extensive portfolio that offers quality solutions across a broad spectrum of applications from light domestic to heavy duty use. The group has over 40 years experience in channel drainage installation. There are more than 5 million metres of ACO products installed in the UK – and more than 100 million metres worldwide. ACO's objective is to maintain its position as market leader in surface water drainage by being innovative and maintaining a high level of product quality and environmental awareness.

ACO manufactures polymer concrete, steel, cast iron and plastic products and is well aware that a company's environmental performance can have a significant impact on its success. ACO has the environmental management system, ISO 14001. This certification demonstrates high environmental standards, compliance with legislation and has helped reduce costs and improve efficiency.

Customer Needs

Richard Hill, Managing Director for ACO Technologies, highlights the commercial advantages leading organizations can gain from adopting an active environmental management system. He explains that the process of learning how to conduct themselves in a more environmentally friendly manner has helped employees discover new efficiencies in manufacturing and improved ways of working. "By challenging everyone to consider how they approach their tasks within the company's developing environmental framework, there has been a new level of creative thinking, a greater sense of shared responsibility and a closer, more open relationship with our suppliers and customers."

Benefits

ACO products have an 'environmental' function which the company wanted to validate by obtaining a credible environmental standard. Far from being merely a 'green badge', ISO 14001 was a business tool that would assist in moving the ACO culture forward. It provides an excellent framework that allowed environmental responsibility to take centre stage in the company and to become embedded as part of the cultural DNA. The ISO 14001 approach is to provide flexible frameworks which enable companies to design and adopt adaptable business management systems. Consequently they improve company culture and move the business forward. ACO achieved ISO 14001 within just six months. Peter Ridgway cautions that it is a serious commitment and requires an ongoing shift in company practice and attitude. However, benefits do not take long to materialise. Implementing ISO 14001 has heightened awareness of all the environmental aspects of ACO's business, has standardized the approach to key responsibilities and has improved understanding of best practice. The workforce now has clearly defined goals and objectives for all areas with an environmental impact. Peter notes that ACO staff, without exception, supported the ISO 14001 objectives and were delighted that company practice and attitude was becoming more aligned with the personal sense of duty felt about sustainability. ACO now makes the ongoing audit requirements of the management system standards part of its business development plan. By doing so ACO is able to improve in a continual and measurable way.

BSI's Role

Certification from BSI offers ACO's customers additional reassurance due to the recognition and respect of the BSI brand. In addition, BSI certification has had a positive

and measurable impact. 'Environmental management is critical to the future of the business and our long-standing relationship with BSI made the organization the natural choice when we decided to embark on ISO 14001' said Peter Ridgway, ACO Market Development Director.

Now that ACO has attained ISO 9001, ISO 14001 and BS OHSAS 18001, the dynamic of the company has changed ensuring a continual focus on the construction industry's growing need for environmentally aware partners and products. The ISO 9001 quality management system quickly became the cornerstone of ACO's drive for growth, enabling ACO to improve business processes and strive for continual improvement. ISO 9001's effect was sufficient to justify embarking on the health and safety management system, BS OHSAS 18001 which had a very positive effect on the culture of the company. A heightened awareness of health and safety means individuals now make positive contributions to improvement on an ongoing basis.

Gaining certification in BS OHSAS 18001 has enabled ACO to demonstrate to existing and potential customers that the company can provide a reliable service without excessive downtime caused by work-related accidents and incidents.

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