



## EMAS HELP-DESK CASE STUDY

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*North  
Wiltshire  
District  
Council*

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Department of the  
**Environment**

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## Background

North Wiltshire is a small District Council serving a population of about 120,000. The area has changed over the last 20 years and although still partially rural, has seen growth in terms of population, traffic and commerce following the completion of the M4 Motorway in the early 1970s. Although many residents have moved to the area within this period, it has largely been the changing face of the district that has led to pressure for environmental protection.

The early actions taken to meet these needs were similar to those undertaken in many authorities. An environmental charter was published in 1990 and a series of fora were held. It was soon realised however, that these actions couldn't achieve on their own any measure of real sustained internal change. It was at just this time that there came the opportunity to take part in the EMAS national pilot scheme. This appeared to offer the structured approach required, and had the opportunity to involve staff. Studies were made of two sections, the committee section and client services whilst work was undertaken on two direct effects, energy and purchasing. It is difficult with hindsight to quantify the results of this work, but above all there was real progress in establishing in-house skills and raising environmental awareness. The main lesson learnt was that the management of environmental issues would only effectively progress as the involvement of staff grew.

Following the end of the national study it was decided to undertake a full pilot within one department of the Council. The Council resolved at the end of 1993 to carry out a detailed study of the Environmental Health Department. The study has taken two years, slightly longer than expected, to reach its present stage of having virtually all the reviews and programmes in place. This report highlights how the process was undertaken, what resources were used, the results found, and the benefits achieved. Finally it looks at the future and the lessons learnt from the exercise.

## Methods Used

The main feature of the approach in North Wiltshire was to involve all staff wherever possible. When the project was started there were two main divisions to the department, Environmental Health and Leisure. There were, in addition, two sections directly managed by the departmental head, Engineers and Client Services. In all areas apart from Leisure, a bottom up approach has been maintained. In the latter area this method was ruled out given the wide range of staff duties involved and the high level of part-time staff.

The standard method has been:

- (i) A "bottom-up" approach - all staff were involved in each section from the start. This was achieved by an initial full-section meeting. The meeting itself was largely an awareness raising exercise, in effect an environmental education workshop. Depending upon time, a start was made on a scoping review.
- (ii) Seek volunteers (representatives) from each section to produce ideas for improvement and carry them forward. The representatives then worked with the key officers (detailed later) to carry out the full review and produce a provisional programme. The section head was also involved at this stage, although the level of involvement varied according to circumstances.
- (iii) Putting the suggestions of the representatives back to the full section.

- (iv) Completing the provisional programme and examining the proposals with the section heads and the Divisional Manager.

The Leisure approach has been to break down the work of the division into areas of activity, to select representatives with the Divisional Manager to give a full coverage and to work with these representatives to carry out the review. For example, one Sports Centre Manager has been a representative. He has completed a review and is briefing the other managers prior to agreement on a programme.

## Resources and Timing

The work to date has all been carried out within existing staff resources. The Environmental Health Department has a small section under the title of Research and Development (R&D), which has the function of progressing health and environmental issues. The section head, a Principal Environmental Health Officer, is designated as the Council's Environmental Coordinator. He and a graduate Technician, have steered the process forward. Upwards of 20% of the former's time and 40% of the latter's time have been involved. In respect of other staff time, this has varied from approximately one day for section members, two days upwards for section heads, to five days upwards for representatives. To date, as will be shown, virtually all programme actions involve staff time for implementation, and this will have to be allowed for in future work programmes.

## The Results

The main result of the process does not appear in the review worksheets or the programme summaries as it is a function of the process itself. This might be described in one word as 'awareness', but hopefully it is more than that. It is certainly too early to talk of a major cultural change, but effectively we are beginning to see the results of greater understanding of the issues and a more positive attitude towards action and involvement.

The most difficult point to get across has been related to the issues of determining what are direct effects and indirect effects. In a sports centre this is of little consequence, the significant direct effects here are clear, energy use. In other words, sports centres can make an important contribution to the environment simply by seeking to save energy. The problems occur when there is little in the way of significant direct effects, but there are hidden indirect effects. The first reaction is still to look at the direct effects, and paper use invariably is highlighted. This can be important. Our past involvement with the committee section revealed huge levels of paper consumption, still of concern today but perhaps with some solutions to hand as information technology expands. Unfortunately however, this approach can blind people to being unable to look at the wider issues, particularly in respect of the purpose of their tasks, and how within the work they do, there might be opportunities to make a positive impact on the environment. Making these links can be difficult, and at first all the issues around indirect effects only emerged from the review process after heavy prompting from the R&D section. However, after the process had been completed and the programmes emerged, others began to come forward with new suggestions and ideas. Whilst this is extremely encouraging, it does serve to emphasise that EMAS needs to be treated as a fluid and changing process, certainly not a task and finish exercise. It also serves as an illustration that such changes in attitude cannot come overnight. To give a contrast we had a recent feedback from an induction course. One participant commented that they

couldn't see the relevance of environmental issues to their post. It is important to realise that we are not going to succeed all the time and that we must stress to Managers and Members not to expect changes to occur overnight.

The work of the representatives was recorded and analysed using the EMAS manual worksheets and the eventual programmes were produced on summary sheets. Examples of these can be found in Appendix 1. Highlights taken from the whole programme include:


- ★ A Seminar on environmental management, prior to the launch of a new initiative to introduce the subject to local businesses through field officers on routine inspections.
- ★ Domestic Section on the road to being able to advise on environmentally-conscious building practices and materials for grants.
- ★ Adoption of the new, environmentally friendly purchasing policy.
- ★ A local consultancy's bulk junk mailings reduced to just a few copies after initial pressure from Commercial Section.
- ★ Environmental Management and Green Tourism to be featured at the annual meeting of North Wiltshire accommodation proprietors in December.
- ★ Possibility of bringing another school into the Eco-Schools project through the EMAS process on the neighbouring leisure centre.
- ★ Environmental Management to be featured in North Wiltshire business event in January.

### The Professional Significance

This study has concentrated on the work of one Department, and consequently has some particular implications as well as the more corporate aspects. As previously outlined, the study has demonstrated that Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) do, as might be expected, a job which does have a positive impact on the environment. At an early stage there was a point of contention both internally and beyond, as to whether doing the job itself was enough. It has been maintained that the managerial aspects of EMAS would dictate that efficiency of action would equate with greatest improvement in environmental performance. Our experience has shown this not to true.

Looking at the opportunities available for EHOs to act has produced some significant new areas of work in this first round, and there is no doubt that there is sufficient fertile ground for many years of progress. Use of an objective approach incorporating some degree of SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) is useful. At the end of the day what is important from a managerial point of view, is making the linkages between environmental progress and achieving statutory objectives. Looking in turn at the questions for Leisure, we have had to put a limit on the number of aspects we can tackle in the first year. As covered earlier, energy and of course water are significant areas. They are though, areas where there is already a fair range of help, not least from the Energy Efficiency Office. There are also a range of initiatives and publications which can widen the approach from greening sport, sustainable tourism to eco-auditing of golf courses.

One criticism voiced of the EMAS in its early stages is perhaps worth a little thought.



EMAS in itself does not state that doing X activity is “green”. What EMAS does is to focus on the process of providing X. The example we had from our earlier study on providing committee reports perhaps illustrates the point. Here members wanted to ensure that everyone was informed, democracy was the key issue, therefore sending out as many copies of minutes etc. as possible was important. With EMAS you accept that and perhaps look to the best way of achieving that objective. A similar thought process might occur with swimming pools. A huge drain on energy resources, but taking the view that they have been provided on the basis that it is beneficial in terms of safety, health and leisure that people swim, then it is the means of doing that which we have to audit.

### The Benefits of EMAS

These have largely been stated both in this article and in other case studies. There will undoubtedly be savings to be made in energy terms, we have experienced changes in staff attitudes, we are currently looking at our management systems both to comply with EMAS but also with a view of integrating environmental issues into our everyday operations. However, were we to isolate one aspect, it would be the question of credibility. EMAS is our passport to the outside world. It enables us to talk to business and provides the opportunity to share our experiences with them. We have adopted the ‘Tidy Britain campaigns’ Eco Schools package, and we have been able to offer our EMAS experience to local schools as an encouragement to them to take an environmental management approach. As we are now starting to develop our Agenda 21 programme, EMAS becomes even more important as we seek to open as many doors as we can in the community at large.

### The Future

We are currently looking at the results of the process and at developing the system to encompass the whole council. We will be seeking to allocate more staff resources to the audit, and its associated area of meeting the training needs that each review has identified. Even so, we feel that it will still take us a further two years to complete this process. This reflects our experience to date in working with as many of our staff as is possible, and thereby gaining the maximum benefit from the scheme.

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### **Help-Desk Pledge to Continual Improvement**

It is the aim of the Help-Desk to continually improve its performance in terms of the quality of advice which is given. If in reading this document you have comments in the style, content or approach which you feel would raise the general level of understanding of LA-EMAS then please contact:

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## APPENDIX 1 - EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMME SUMMARY SHEETS

EMAS Programme Summary  
CLIENT SERVICES SECTION - JUNE 1995

ACTION	INDICATOR	TARGET	DATE BY	RESP
1 Analyse water and electricity readings from for public conveniences	water & electricity used	-	Oct 95	SS
1a Take appropriate action to reduce energy and water use	-	-	-	SS + FWH
2 Monitor number of bulky refuse collections	number of collections	-	Apr 96	MRL
2a Monitor number of fly-tipping incidents	number of incidents	-	Apr 96	MRL
2b Investigate how to reduce negative impact of refuse collection fleet	-	Investigated	Dec 95	FWH+?
3 Monitor recycling activity against 'The Business Plan'	% recycled	14% (1995/1996)	Apr 96	MRL
3a Extend composting scheme from 300 to 2000 homes	number of homes	2000 homes	Apr 96	MRL
3b Investigate re-starting office paper recycling in all NWDC offices	% offices	100%	Dec 96	MRL
4 Grounds maintenance - monitor on a set of indicators:				
Grass areas	area / cuts per year	less area cut a lot	ongoing	SS + ?
Weedkillers and fertilisers	amounts of what	reduce	ongoing	SS + ?
Habitat improvement project sites	number	1 per officer per year	Apr 96	SS/AJL/THS/CH
Trees	number planted	more than felled	Apr 96	SS + ?
Trees	number felled	N/A	Apr 96	SS
4a Investigate weed-suppression practices for shrub beds	-	Investigated	Dec 95	SS + ?
4b Find courses on best env practice for grounds maintenance	-	Found	Oct 95	R&D
5 Provide more info at recycling centres (eg what happens to it next)	number of centres done	?	Apr 96	MRL
5a Extend newspaper adverts on bank hol collections to other info	-	1 advert to test idea	Apr 96	?
5b Send info pack on EPA etc. to Parish Councils and NWDC cllts	number sent	all	Dec 96	SS+?

## APPENDIX 1 - continued

Food Section - EMAS Programme  
25 MAY 1994

ACTION	INDICATOR	TARGET	TARGET DATE	RESPONSIBLE
1 Feasibility of on-screen reporting	-	Decision yes/no	End Aug	AI/SF/WA
Reduce no. of printed reports	Paper volume	(Monitor)	End Aug	AI/SF
Move terminal to allow on screen reporting	-	Moved	ASAP	SF/WA
2. Monitor paper use for whole dept	Paper volume	(Monitor + review)	End Aug	WA
3. Monitor paper use in Food section	Paper volume	(Monitor + review)	End Aug	TBA
4. Feasibility of section codes on copier	-	Decision yes/no	End Aug	WA
5. Feasibility of seeing further ahead on reports	-	Decision yes/no	End Sept	AI/SF/WA
Reduce no. of car journeys	No. combined journeys	(Monitor)	End Sept	AI/SF
6. Identify best practice for car use	-	Identified	End Nov	DW
7. Liaise ref section cooperation/organisation	-	Agreement	End Dec	All principals
8. Prototype advice pack + newsletter	-	Done	End Dec	PB/DW
Finished version of above	-	Done	May 95	PB/DW
9. Basic env. training for all Food section	No. trained	All trained	End Nov	PB/DW
10. Identify advanced env training courses	-	Identified	End Nov	PB
11. Promote best environmental practice in businesses				



APPENDIX 1 - continued

EMAS Programme Summary  
DOMESTIC SECTION - August 1995

ACTION	INDICATOR	TARGET	DATE BY	RESP
1 Include environment-conscious building advice in grant schedules	Number of grants added to	All applicable grants	June 96	All
1a Get information on environment-conscious building practices	-	Done	Nov 95	R&D/GJ
1b Set up training for no. 1 (with Bldg Inspectors, Planners and Anchor?)	-	Training done	Mar 95	R&D/GJ
2 Investigate use of cheaper 'star-point' type of system to assess insulation needs		Decision yes/no	Wait new EM* & guidance for Energy Act**	JFN
3 Minimise paper use in the office - double sided letters/'scrap' boxes on all desks/use of 'scrap' for notepaper and draft printing/ double-sided copying/collect all completely used paper for recycling	Amount of paper used	10% reduction (Brookfield House)	June 96	All
3a Inform core services when mail is junk and can be stopped	Total number stopped	10 stopped	June 96	All
4 Use less office stationery, pens etc.	?	?	?	All/?
5 Establish information requirements, as preparation for MKA system	-	Done	ASAP	JFN + all
5a Assess priorities for Section by using annually-collated data	-	Done	When suitable	JFN + all
6 Get information on alternative waste treatments such as reed beds or composting toilets, and examine scope for installations	-	Done	Dec 95	
7 Ensure that work with Anchor (Staying Put) is confirmed, as this means more properties are improved through more but smaller grants	Number of Anchor grants	?	ongoing	JFN

\* EM = Energy Manager

\*\* Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

APPENDIX 1 - continued

EMAS Programme Summary  
COMMERCIAL SECTION - JULY 1995

ACTION	INDICATOR	TARGET	DATE BY	RESP
1 Minimise paper use in the office, by continuing good practices	Amount of paper used	10% less (Brookfield House)	July 96	All
1a Investigate reducing paper for computer reports with Core Services, and using double-sided call-forward sheets	-	Done	Oct 95	DF, JF
1b Inform Core Services when junk mail can be stopped	Total number stopped	5	July 96	All
2 Minimise amounts of 'office supplies' (pens etc.) in circulation in office	-	-	Oct 95	All
3 Find out if office insulation adequate	-	Asked	Wait new EM*	MD,DF,JF
3a Find out if lighting can be improved (switch on fewer etc)	-	Asked	Wait new EM*	MD,DF,JF
4 Do leaflet encouraging environmental management in local businesses		Done	May 95	R&D
4a Officers give out above leaflet in course of duties/record to whom given	Number issued	-	-	All field o's
4b Get response of businesses to leaflet	No of firms contacted	-	Oct 95	R&D
<b>LONGER TERM ACTIONS</b>				
1 Lobby for action on NWDC transport policy, with aim to reduce car use	-	-	-	MD + All
2 Investigate changes in working practices (area offices, homeworking etc.) with aim to increase effectiveness, possibly also reduce car use	-	-	-	MD + All

\* EM = Energy Manager