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Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

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Foreword

ISO (the International Organization for Standardization) is a worldwide federation of national standards bodies (ISO member bodies). The work of preparing International Standards is normally carried out through ISO technical committees. Each member body interested in a subject for which a technical committee has been established has the right to be represented on that committee. International organizations, governmental and non-governmental, in liaison with ISO, also take part in the work. ISO collaborates closely with the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) on all matters of electrotechnical standardization.

International Standards are drafted in accordance with the rules given in the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 2.

The main task of technical committees is to prepare International Standards. Draft International Standards adopted by the technical committees are circulated to the member bodies for voting. Publication as an International Standard requires approval by at least 75 % of the member bodies casting a vote.

Attention is drawn to the possibility that some of the elements of this document may be the subject of patent rights. ISO shall not be held responsible for identifying any or all such patent rights.

ISO 14063 was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 207, *Environmental management*.

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Introduction

0.1 Over the past two decades, communication on environmental values, actions and performance has become an essential activity of organizations, because of increased public concern and interest, and governmental activities related to the environment. Organizations all over the world are increasingly confronted with the need to express their views, and present and explain the environmental implications of their activities, products and services. There is also a growing need to listen to interested parties, and incorporate their views and requirements as part of environmental communication.

Organizations have a need to obtain and provide information about and respond to environmental issues, concerns and programmes. This is influenced by factors such as the organization's geographic location and distribution, size and types of activities. Motivations for communication can include the following:

— the interest of the organization to share information on its environmental practices;

— a request for information by employees or investors, a government agency, a community group, a customer or supplier, or any other interested party;

— the need to discuss with interested parties, especially with target groups, a proposed action of the organization, such as expansion of an existing facility, or siting of a new facility, or the introduction of a new product or service;

— environmental risk management;

— a regulatory requirement;

— response to complaints from interested parties;

— the increasing importance of addressing environmental issues.

Environmental communication is the process of sharing information to build trust, credibility and partnerships, to raise awareness, and to use in decision making. The processes used and the content of environmental communication will vary with the objectives and circumstances of the organization and should be built on substantive information.

0.2 Environmental communication is broader than environmental reporting. It has many purposes and takes many forms. Environmental communication can be *ad hoc* or planned. An example of *ad hoc* communication occurs when a facility manager attends a community event and answers questions. Planned communication can cover the range from limited to full participation of interested parties as shown below.

a) One-way communication occurs when the organization distributes information, for example when an organization issues an environmental report with no opportunity for questions or discussion.

b) Two-way communication occurs with an exchange of information and ideas among the organization and interested parties.

c) In participatory decision-making, including effective feedback that affects the organization and/or the local community, an organization collaborates with interested parties.

0.3 Engagement with interested parties provides an opportunity for an organization to learn their issues and concerns; it can lead to knowledge being gained by both sides and can influence opinions and perceptions. When properly done, any particular approach can be successful and satisfy the needs of the organization and interested parties. In some cases, understanding the communication pattern/behaviour of each interested party (or target group) is also important in environmental communications. The most effective environmental communication process involves ongoing contact by the organization with internal and external interested parties, as part of the organization's overall communications strategy.

Figure 1 shows the interrelationships and flow of environmental communication.
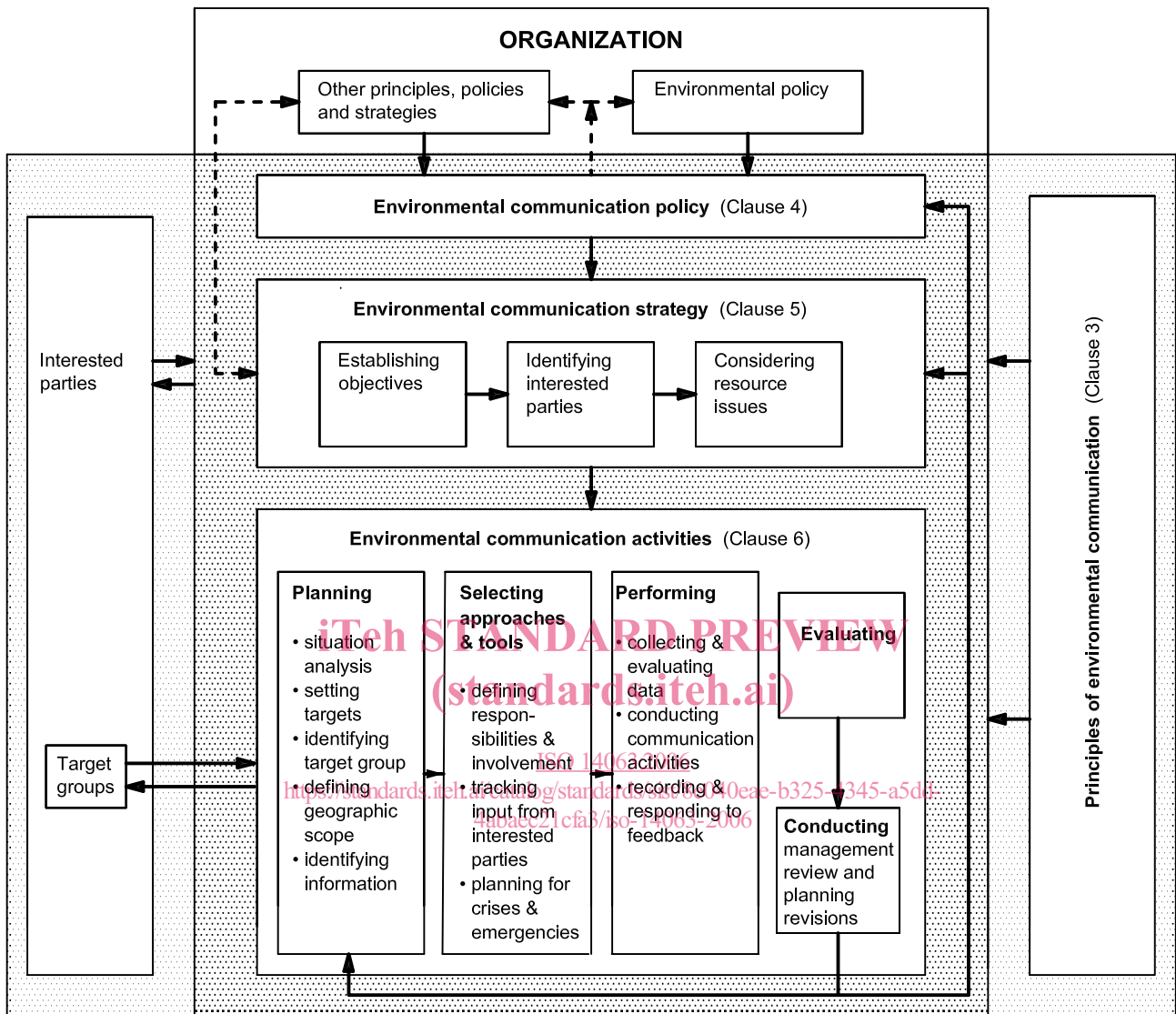
NOTE 1   Titles in bold and numbered refer to the clauses in this International Standard.

NOTE 2   Dotted line arrows indicate the environmental communication system relationship with other elements of the organization; full arrows indicate the interrelationship within the environmental communication system.

NOTE 3   Shading indicates the scope of the environmental communication system; darker shading indicates the overlap of the environmental communication system with the organization.

Figure 1 — Environmental communication

0.4   Environmental communication often results in many benefits, such as

— assisting interested parties in understanding an organization's environmental commitments, policies and performance,

— providing inputs/suggestions for improving the environmental performance of an organization's activities, products and services, and progress toward sustainability,

— improving understanding of interested parties' needs and concerns to foster trust and dialogue,

— promoting an organization's environmental credentials, achievements and performance,

— raising the importance and level of environmental awareness to support an environmentally responsible culture and values within the organization,

— addressing interested parties' concerns and complaints about operational and emergency environmental hazards,

— enhancing interested parties' perceptions of the organization, and

— increasing business support and shareholder confidence.

Environmental communication is one of the crucial issues to be dealt with by any organization, with or without an environmental management system (EMS) in place. Environmental communication is more than a question of organization and management, it relates to organization values as well. To ensure successful communication processes, it is important for the organization to consider itself a responsible partner within society and to address the environmental expectations of interested parties.

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Environmental management — Environmental communication — Guidelines and examples

1 Scope

This International Standard gives guidance to an organization on general principles, policy, strategy and activities relating to both internal and external environmental communication. It utilizes proven and well-established approaches for communication, adapted to the specific conditions that exist in environmental communication. It is applicable to all organizations regardless of their size, type, location, structure, activities, products and services, and whether or not they have an environmental management system in place.

This International Standard is not intended for use as a specification standard for certification or registration purposes or for the establishment of any other environmental management system conformity requirements. It can be used in combination with any of the ISO 14000 series of standards, or on its own.

NOTE 1   A reference table to the ISO 14000 series is provided in Annex A.

NOTE 2   ISO 14020, ISO 14021, ISO 14024 and ISO 14025 provide specific environmental communication tools and guidance relating to product labels and declarations.

2 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

2.1
environmental communication
process that an organization conducts to provide and obtain information, and to engage in dialogue with internal and external interested parties to encourage a shared understanding on environmental issues, aspects and performance

2.2
environmental communication policy
overall intentions and directions of an organization related to its environmental communication as formally expressed by top management

NOTE   The environmental communication policy can be a separate policy or part of other policies within the organization.

2.3
environmental communication strategy
organization's framework for implementing its environmental communication policy and for the setting of environmental communication objectives and targets

2.4
organization
company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporated or not, public or private, that has its own functions and administration

NOTE   For organizations with more than one operating unit, a single operating unit may be defined as an organization.

[ISO 14001:2004, 3.16]

2.5
interested party
person or group concerned with or affected by the environmental performance of an organization

[ISO 14001:2004, 3.13]

2.6
target group
interested party or parties selected as the focus of an organization's environmental communication activity

2.7
environmental communication objective
overall environmental communication goal consistent with the environmental communication policy that an organization sets itself to achieve as part of its environmental communication strategy

2.8
environmental communication target
detailed performance requirement, applicable to the organization, which arises from the environmental communication objectives and which needs to be set and met in order to achieve those objectives

3 Principles of environmental communication

3.1 General

It is essential that an organization apply the principles described below to its environmental communication.

3.2 Principles

3.2.1 Transparency

Make the processes, procedures, methods, data sources and assumptions used in environmental communication available to all interested parties, taking account of the confidentiality of information as required. Inform interested parties of their role in environmental communication.

3.2.2 Appropriateness

Make information provided in environmental communication relevant to interested parties, using formats, language and media that meet their interests and needs, enabling them to participate fully.

3.2.3 Credibility

Conduct environmental communication in an honest and fair manner, and provide information that is truthful, accurate, substantive and not misleading to interested parties. Develop information and data using recognized and reproducible methods and indicators.

3.2.4 Responsiveness

Ensure that environmental communication is open to the needs of interested parties. Respond to the queries and concerns of interested parties in a full and timely manner. Make interested parties aware of how their queries and concerns have been addressed.

3.2.5 Clarity

Ensure that environmental communication approaches and language are understandable to interested parties to minimize ambiguity.

4 Environmental communication policy

4.1 Management commitment

The organization's top management should set, express its commitment to, and promote the environmental communication policy. The policy should be consistent with the principles in Clause 3 and should clearly state the following:

a) commitment to engage in dialogue with interested parties;

b) commitment to disclose information about its environmental performance;

c) significance of internal and external environmental communication in the organization;

d) commitment to implement the policy and provide the necessary resources;

e) commitment to address key environmental issues.

The environmental communication policy may form part of, or be integrated into, an organization's communication policy or environmental policy, or may be a separate policy.

4.2 Developing the policy

In developing the policy, those responsible for environmental management within the organization should interact and engage with those responsible for communication to ensure that the policy is coherent and consistent with other principles, policies and the values of the organization. Subsequently, all levels of management should implement the policy and provide input for the formulation and modification of the policy.

An environmental communication policy does not need to be detailed, but should convey to interested parties the importance that the organization places on communication about environmental issues, environmental aspects and their associated impacts, and environmental performance. An organization's vision, mission, values and culture should play a fundamental role in developing an environmental communication policy. The organization should make a commitment in the policy to reflect local, regional and/or national cultural characteristics in its environmental communication activities, where applicable.

Important factors that should be considered when developing an environmental communication policy include

— the organization's business sector and its product or service portfolio,

— organization's size,

— organizational infrastructure,

— corporate governance,

— market and brand strategies,

— the existence of an environmental management system,

— consideration of environmental aspects and impacts,

— interaction with related aspects like health and safety and other sustainability approaches,

— legal requirements regarding disclosure of environmental information,

— local, regional, national and international voluntary codes of ethics/conduct,

— expectations of interested parties, and

— the public's "right to know".

The policy should be communicated to interested parties, both internal and external as appropriate.

5 Environmental communication strategy

5.1 General considerations

The organization's management should develop a strategy to implement its environmental communication policy. The strategy should include environmental communication objectives, identification of interested parties, an indication of when and what it plans to communicate, and a management commitment to allocate adequate resources. An organization should clarify what is possible, taking into account its resources so that it can best and most realistically meet the expectations of interested parties.

Consideration should be given to the fact that environmental communication is part of the organization's environmental activities in general and should be aligned with other elements of management systems, policies, strategies or relevant activities.

Practical help box 1 — Developing the environmental communication strategy

When developing the environmental communication strategy, the questions below can be helpful.

- Why is the organization engaging in environmental communication and what are its purposes?

- What are the organization's key environmental issues and impacts?

- What are the main issues to be covered, messages to be conveyed, and communication techniques, approaches, tools and channels to be used?

- How much time is needed to implement the strategy?

- How will the strategy involve and coordinate the environmental managers, interested parties, individual(s) responsible for environmental issues and individual(s) who are responsible for the organization's internal and external communication?

- What are the local, regional, national and international boundaries for the strategy?

Once defined, the strategy should be approved by top management and then used as the basis for the organization's environmental communications activities.

5.2 Establishing environmental communication objectives

An organization should set environmental objectives, which are useful because they can provide the basis for an effective environmental communication strategy. When setting its environmental communication objectives, an organization should ensure that they are aligned with its environmental communication policy, take account of the views of internal and external interested parties, and are consistent with the environmental communication principles in Clause 3. On setting objectives for its environmental communication activities, the organization should consider its priorities and desired results, making sure that the objectives defined are expressed in such a way that no further explanations are necessary.