

# Coping with environmental management

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**C**oping with environmental management across the scope of military activities we know today could assume the form of a multitude of isolated endeavours faced independently by different force structure elements in a frantic reaction to any range of prevailing environmental issues. The Defence Force could, on the other hand, follow the proven path of an integrated, systematic approach that anticipates management intervention and strives toward continual improvement in the environmental management performance of the organisation as a whole.

The Defence Force in South Africa has a history of environmental care dating back as far as 1978 when the first internal policies on the environment were formally adopted. An early focus to this effect on nature conservation or ecological management had to make way for the more contemporary strategy of military integrated environmental management (MIEM).

This approach considers the entire scope of military activities and their associated impact on all spheres of the environment in a quest for sustainable military use of any area of land or sea, or the airspace entrusted to the DOD for use in conducting its mission. Such an ostensibly pervasive approach understandably presents the DOD with marked challenges in engaging and co-ordinating environmental management performance in the absence of any formal or

integrated system. This situation is aggravated by a climate that demands compliance with the prescripts of proliferating environmental legislation.

The First Edition Environmental Implementation Plan for the Defence Force finally published as Government Notice No 249 in Government Gazette 22022 of 16 February 2001, publicly acknowledges the quest for continual improvement in environmental management performance throughout the DOD. The final chapter in this fundamental document lists various recommendations aimed at bridging inadequacies or deficiencies in both the environmental management performance and capacity. As a key recommendation, the DOD is urged to develop and implement an Environmental Management System (EMS) in accordance with the International Standards

Organisation's ISO14000 series, which is the international standard for environmental management. Through this mechanism it is envisaged ensuring that controls are in place for a universal understanding of the levels of required environmental management performance, measuring current performance, identifying improvement potential, implementing an improvement plan, and controlling and tracking critical military activities that affect the environment.

Although the concept of developing an integrated EMS for Defence in South Africa would indeed be a novel idea, the Committee for the Challenges of Modern Society (CCMS) of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), has been doing this since 1996 through a Pilot Study Group on EMSs in the military sector. The final report of the CCMS Pilot Study Group was finally issued in March 2000, and to date the military in several European countries has adopted ISO14000 which has resulted

## Defence in South Africa has a history of environmental care.

in advanced progress in the implementation of this system in the military sector. This is most evident in the Eastern European nations. The acclaimed legacy of the environment in South Africa has become widely known even in the international arena. The SA DOD was therefore granted special permission in 1996 to participate in proceedings of the CCMS Pilot Study Group even though South Africa is not a member of NATO.

This privilege was granted on the grounds of the South African legacy of corporate military environmental responsibility together with the understanding that guidelines advocated in the final report of the Pilot Study Group could be adapted as well to apply locally in the development of an EMS for Defence to elevate MIEM to new levels of performance. Many of the fundamental findings in the March 2000 final report No 240 of the CCMS Pilot Study Group on EMSs in the Military Sector were indeed contained in a strategic proposal developed by the Strategic Environmental Working Group for Defence (SEWing Group).

This proposal effectively mapped the route toward establishing an ISO14000-series EMS for Defence in South Africa. By July 2000 as a result of this strategic proposal, the Environmental Review Forum for Defence (ERF) was instituted by the Plenary Defence Staff Council (PDSC) in succession to the SEWing Group. Its task as a working group of the PDSC was twofold; firstly to design and

develop a contextual EMS for Defence following the guidelines of the ISO14000 archetype; secondly, once completed, to implement and maintain the functioning of an EMS within the DOD. The ERF was essentially constituted of representatives recruited from Level 2 structures of each corporate division and the Services. Together they have convened monthly since March 2001 to follow a structured process of building the EMS element by element until the first draft was completed by May 2003.

The assignment to the ERF was a daunting one that so far has overseen the development and promulgation of a Corporate Environmental Policy Statement for Defence in September 2001 in which the Defence Force High Command issues the scope and boundaries within which the DOD pledges henceforth to address environmental care within its unique domain of business. In order to fulfil such a commitment, the ERF conducted a review of all environmental legislation applicable to the DOD in order to determine the fundamental requirements for environmental compliance. This review spanned all of the 35 national acts and 72 scheduled processes that foster some kind of environmental compliance implication for the DOD. It included various regulations and provincial legislation of a similar nature.

The ERF then embarked on the protracted process of an initial environmental review. This process entailed a comprehensive survey of all military activities and determining the relationship of each with a series of nine environmental characteristics, in order to arrive at a shortlist of significant environmental issues. The scope of military activities was derived from the core objectives and outputs in the Level 2 plans of each of the corporate divisions and the Services. The nine environmental characteristics used in the initial review are consistent with sustainable development and to those applied extensively by industry in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), thus covering all of the physical, biological, social and economic components of the environment. The

shortlist of environmental impacts was ultimately prioritised and condensed to precipitate the seven most significant environmental issues faced by the DOD. The seven most significant environmental issues within Defence, as prioritised by the ERF following the process of initial environmental review, comprise waste management, water and soil pollution, contamination of land by unexploded ordnance, EIA planning, cultural resources and veld-fire management. These issues are now being further analysed and assessed from various angles to arrive at a tailored action plan or corporate environmental management programme that will address each of the most significant environmental issues.

The ERF continued to add other elements, such as environmental education, training and development, environmental communication, environmental contingency planning, monitoring and measurement, auditing, reporting, environmental awards and incentive programmes. Each of these elements constitute the EMS and

will manifest quite differently where it is administered at strategic level to where it is implemented either at executive or operational level within the organisation. For this reason the ERF has followed a line of thought in which three main products emerged from the development phase.

The first product was an overarching departmental policy regulating process associated with the implementation of EMS

at corporate level that issues specific instructions and delegations to appropriate corporate divisions and the Services. The second appears in the form of a manual with clear guidelines on the process of developing and implementing a more conventional site-specific EMS. The latter will apply and be made available to every primary element identified at operational level (general support bases or force structure elements) at which a functional EMS could be situated. The third and final product is an implementation plan that considers peripheral issues, actions and resources required to cost, systematically introduce and establish EMS within the DOD at a steady pace set by predetermined milestones.

From June 2003 the ERF entered the implementation phase of its task which entails the introduction and implementation of the EMS for defence at base level, which increased gradually and judiciously, the first introductions being limited to trials on a selected sample of bases and installations in the course of 2003. 

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