

Name of Exercise: Public participation in the development of an environmental management system in the furniture production industry in the Dobrich region.

Location: The village of Paskalevo and city of Dobrich

Participation Exercise under which Article? *Articles 6 and 7*

Purpose of Participation Exercise:

To generate the participation of NGOs in the development of an Environmental Management System (EMS) for private furniture production company "Sequoia," situated in the Dobrich region. The principal purpose of this project was to implement the EMS in every aspect of the operations of the furniture manufacturing facility and to demonstrate the resulting benefits.

Background:

"Sequoia" is situated in a region near the Black Sea recreation zone where it is necessary to minimise all environmental pollutants. "Sequoia" therefore decided to propose ecological improvements in its furniture production which would be guided by an Environmental Management System (EMS). The aim was to achieve not only an ecologically efficient production process but also a final product that is environmentally sound in all respects, including waste management.

The project was strongly supported by the local authorities and NGOs in the Dobrich municipality. An NGO — "Association of Furniture Producers in the Dobrich Region" — was formed by the furniture producing firms of the Dobrich region. This Association, together with the Mayor of Dobrich, invited representatives of one environmental NGO to assist "Sequoia" in the development of the EMS.

Participation Techniques Used:

This is a case where the NGO representing the furniture producers in the Dobrich region "Association of Furniture Producers in the Dobrich Region" and the local self-government invited environmental NGOs and the public to participate and to assist the development of the EMS.

The NGO "Association of Furniture Producers in the Dobrich Region" used the local press to invite other interested participants and stakeholders. The invitation explained the need for public participation and assessment of the project's benefits and informed the general public about the EMS in "Sequoia". A meeting was held in order to obtain the input of the public as well as expert opinions on the EMS. The Association identified the environmentally oriented NGOs in the region (there are three of them) and invited them by phone. It also ran an advertisement in the local newspaper 3 times, and broadcast announcements over local radio to reach the general public.

Who participated?

Almost all the participants in the case helped in developing the EMS, including representatives from the NGO "Association of Furniture Producers in the Dobrich Region", representatives from the local self government and approximately 30 representatives from the local environmental NGOs. An additional 25 or so members of the general public, most of them inhabitants of Paskalevo, participated in the meeting.

Stage at which public participated in the process:

In this case the public was invited to participate and to assist with the development of the EMS at the beginning of the process. The public participation is considered as a part of stage II of EMS development: "Declaration of firm's environmental policy". Public participation was a requirement of the international assistance obtained in developing the EMS for "Sequoia".

What information was made available?

Information on promoting and understanding the principles and benefits of the EMS were made available. The president of Sequoia communicated to the public the Declaration of the firm about the environmental policy and the benefits for the local population and the firm personnel. This was done through articles in the press as well as by the statement at the public hearing.

Information on the problems, obstacles and the efforts of the firm to meet the requirements of the environmental laws – like the Environmental Law; the Air, Water and Soil Protection Law; the Nature

Protection Law; the Waste Management Law; and the Regulation on the health and hygiene standards, was also made available through articles in the press and by statements at the public hearing.

The local NGOs explained the principles of environmental management and the expected project outcomes at the public hearing, and also at a Business Forum in Dobrich.

The whole pilot project of "Sequoia" was widely disseminated and has served as an example of an approach to implementation of an EMS.

What was the outcome of the public participation exercise?

The expected project outcomes are:

- improvement of the environment in the furniture department and in the Paskalevo village;
- creating a positive image and increasing the market access for exported production made by "Sequoia" by meeting the requirements of ISO 14001;
- increasing the demand of the production of "Sequoia" on the domestic market by clients purchasing furniture for the hotels in the recreation zone;
- promoting an understanding of the principles and benefits of the EMS.

Additionally, the pilot project of "Sequoia" will be widely advertised and will serve as example of EMS implementation approach. The company has received an increase in orders for furniture and attribute this in part to the adoption of the EMS strategy and improvement of its public image.

Other furniture firms, who are members of the local trade association, have shown interest in the EMS and the environmental NGOs have started to work with the firm "CODY" in Dobrich.

Additionally, the interest in environmental management in the Dobrich region has increased as a whole. People wanted to know more about the new environmental requirements and standards. There has been interest on the part of the municipality to organise a training course on ISO 14001 in Dobrich, and a local NGO has organised a number of environmental courses in this region. These courses were attended by managers of private and state owned firms from the region of Dobrich, Rousse and Varna, representatives of the local Chambers of Commerce and some consulting firms working in the field of ISO 9000 – QS.

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REC view on participation exercise:

In the "Sequoia" case a trade and industry group has taken it upon itself to conduct public participation in the development of its plans for restructuring production in a transitional economy. In doing so it has noted concrete benefits to its business. The case has elements of Article 7 in terms of planning, but is also a good example of an Article 6, paragraph 5, approach which provides that states should encourage the private sector to engage the public in discussions at an early stage.

This case study also demonstrates that environmentally-oriented projects, such as those involving EMS, can have an impact outside the specific project, for example by promoting public participation in environmental decision-making and raising awareness of environmental issues generally.

An environmental project of this kind taken on by industry can be assured to have a large measure of support from the environmentally-active public. Therefore, it has value as a demonstration of how public participation can work in practice and provides a good example of partnership between business, local authorities, NGOs and the public.

Significant omissions from requirements of Article 6 or 7:

As this case involves preliminary voluntary activities by a trade and industry group the obligations of Articles 6 and 7 do not apply. The case is a good example of the "soft" obligation found in Article 6.5, which although not expressly incorporated into Article 7, nonetheless could be included within its frame.