**Environmental Auditing**

*by Shirley Green*

*Summary of a presentation made by Shirley Green of the Occupational Health, Safety and Environment department of SAIT to the membership of the Building Operators Association (Calgary) at the November 1999 meeting.*

**What is Environmental Auditing?**

By definition, it is a risk management and loss prevention tool for taking inventory of an organization’s environmental assets and liabilities through a systematic and objective evaluation of the organization’s management systems, compliance with environmental laws and regulations, and compliance with internal environmental policies and standards.

**Why conduct an environmental audit?**

There are several potential benefits associated with environmental auditing. An audit will:

* verify compliance with environmental legislation, diminishing liability of organizational officers or directors
* assess performance, identifying future problems and remedies for immediate ones
* demonstrate due diligence showing reasonable care and precautions are in place to prevent a possible offense
* verifies environmental management system is working
* educate and ensure employees are informed of environmental regulations and procedures
* prevent environmental liability in business transactions and may make financing and insurance easier to obtain.

**The Historical Review**

Prior to a first-time audit, a historical review should be included in the pre-audit activities. The baseline audit may take an extended period of time due to environmental issues that arise during the audit period which may require the auditor’s attention and involvement.

**Regulatory Review**

A list of all pertinent regulations and departmental structures should be compiled before the site visit. The audit may also address additional areas such as corporate and industry standards and guidelines. These are examined from a management standpoint through examinations and evaluations of the permits and licences, environmental policies and standards, communications and training.

**The Audit Tool and Protocol**

1. A review of company records and files is conducted to:

* evaluate the facility operations with regard to environmental management and performance
* establish and/or measure compliance status with regulations and company policies
* ensure the environment is protected

2. Interviews with management and personnel will:

* evaluate management commitment to environmental stewardship
* evaluate facility personnel’s awareness of company environmental policy
* ensure staff is effectively trained and aware of their environmental responsibilities
* identify checks and procedures that are in place to ensure the standard of practice is achieved

3. The physical inspection of facilities will:

* enable the collection of evidence through visual examination
* provide for observation of critical operations helps in determining where/how any sampling should be conducted
* facilitate recommendations for immediate corrective action

**Create an Action Plan**

After the environmental audit report has been submitted to management, realistic goals and objectives should be set to improve environmental performance. These goals can include, but are not limited to:

* written policies showing management commitment to environmental stewardship
* communication of environmental responsibilities to allemployees
* solid and hazardous waste reduction, efficient water and energy use initiatives
* continuous monitoring, measuring and accounting of initiatives to evaluate effectiveness and success.