

Case Study for Honda Transmission Manufacturing Plant

In August 2000, Ohio EPA visited the Honda Transmission Manufacturing (HTM) Plant in Russells Point, Ohio. OEPA met with Lee Sanders, environmental coordinator for the plant, and Patty Whitehead, the safety coordinator for Honda. These Honda associates explained what they encountered when developing and registering their environmental management system.

HTM had the goal to be the first Honda plant in the United States to become certified in ISO 14001. It was a demanding goal for two main reasons. First, ISO 14001 was still a newer concept in 1997 and few resources and precedents had been established. Honda had to sort out the information that was available and find resources that were useful to them and the operations at their plant. Secondly, this particular plant had not gone through ISO 9000 registration and could not refer to their own prior experience with the registration process. They had to set their own path.

Another challenge Honda faced was establishing the ISO14001 certification as a priority. It would require a lot of immediate resources because of the short duration of time they had to accomplish the goal. Honda realized they should have outside assistance, and finding a consulting firm who met their needs was also a challenge.

Despite these hindrances, Honda did many things right. They established a team representing their different departments and lines. They insisted on management support, even when management initially had not seen the EMS as main priority or perhaps not one which required major resources. But in order to implement the EMS throughout the plant within Honda's chosen time frame, setting aside those resources was necessary. They compiled a thorough training program which provided interaction with the employees. They emphasized the important role employees have incorporating the EMS in their daily tasks.

Honda also excels in awarding associates for their improvement efforts. Pride Circle Teams are encouraged to try new ideas. Every year, an improvement project is selected, and the team who initiated the project gets to participate in the world conference.

Honda is working to divide the costs from the overhead funds and associate expenses with the specific processes, such as disposal costs and energy costs. They are also trying to find better ways to track the resources saved from their improvements.

There are many good things that have come from establishing the EMS. The departments and different lines now work together on waste issues and process improvements. They take into consideration how their material and waste fits into the overall production and take responsibility for finding solutions which won't cause greater problems for another department.

Some suggestions from the Honda coordinators: keep it simple and keep documentation accessible. These two ideas helped them in their certification process.

Ms. Sanders is now attempting to assist the suppliers and other plants in their efforts to implement an EMS. Honda has requested Tier 1 suppliers and Honda joint ventures to be registered by March 2002. They have also requested other suppliers to seek registration.

Honda has realized many benefits from their EMS. Employees throughout the plant realize the effect their routine tasks have on the environmental factors of the plant's operation. And because of that, they find ways to improve the things they do. 'Environmental' is no longer a department, it is part of the way they operate.

- Debora Depweg, August 2000