



# Know your environmental responsibilities

As Environmental Management Systems (EMS) have now become an essential part of our standard operating procedures and thought processes, it is becoming increasingly necessary for field and operational staff in the industries of engineering, manufacturing, construction and mining to take on the responsibilities of the supervision of on-site environmental compliance.

Phil Abernethy, Managing Director of Absorb Environmental Solutions, points out, "Personnel such as OHS officers, quality assessors and production managers have the appropriate experience and qualifications when it comes to their chosen field - the main issue that exists is how to tackle their new environmental management tasks. Many find they lack the knowledge of how to manage environmental impacts, including how to objectively complete an environmental site audit and to accurately measure the risk associated with each area.

"The objective of an EMS is not only to measure your site's environmental compliance and manage risk, but to continually improve your site's environmental performance. The successful result is to have confident, suitably trained staff with the right equipment and the correct site procedures to minimise potential harm to themselves, the environment and the company," Phil adds.

Seeing this demand in the market, Phil responded by creating a Certificate IV in On-Site Environmental Management in 2007. After extensive industry

consultation, he decided the best approach was to design a comprehensive, nationally recognised course that developed environmental management skills on a practical level, covering the legislation, theory and practice of delivering positive environmental outcomes. Phil adds, "My philosophy has always been to provide practical environmental knowledge that allows participants to immediately apply new environmental awareness to their day-to-day work."

Significantly, this course has provided attendees with a practical foundation in the policies and principles to create and implement their own Site Environmental Management Plan. The course has now been running for over three years with more than 750 participants from a wide range of industries and occupations, with the success of the course leading Phil to establish Absorb Training as a National Registered Training Organisation in early 2009.

"I wanted to be able to create a training environment where trainers could inspire people and foster a motivation to commit to good environmental governance. Rather than reacting from fear of government penalties, the most powerful motivation to comply with environmental standards should be a sense of personal and professional pride in our standard of conduct, and a desire to meet wider community expectations of us and the organisations we work for."

The result is a course based heavily on class interaction, where trainers and participants share their own knowledge for the benefit of all. Phil, who leads most courses, says, "One of the most beneficial ways of learning is hearing other people's environmental problems, and discussing the best approach to issues such as erosion and sediment control and spill management, where definitive solutions are hard to find."

The definition of 'leading practice' for spill management suffers from similar problems to those encountered with compliance to Dangerous Goods



## Spill management

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Regulations. The problem is a lack of specific detail on what is required to meet leading practice and the result is a long list of areas that must be addressed. “Many people ask me what regulations govern the way a spill is dealt with,” Phil says, “All OHS and environmental regulations require liquids spills to be cleaned up, but the frustrating part for the novice is none of them tell you how; however, from my experience I can offer them clear guidance in this area.”

Another aspect of the course that attendees have found valuable is participating in an environmental audit on a working site. Phil continues, “The usual comment I receive while

on site is how hard it is for personnel such as OHS officers to take off their ‘OHS hat’ and purely concentrate on the environmental aspects of a site. This really drives home how hard it can be when you are out in the field to detect possible environmental hazards without the proper training and awareness.

Phil has now launched an Advanced Diploma in Environmental Management. Designed for environmental managers, this course builds on the Certificate IV course and concentrates on the practical application of environmental management and developing a deeper understanding of the issues which environmental managers are re-



*Phil Abernethy, Absorb Environmental Solutions*

quired to handle. It is also anticipated that participants will select practical exercises in which they have a particular interest, such as storm water management, erosion and sediment control, and energy audits. The course will be running in 2010.

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