

A multi-site approach towards integrating environmental management in the wine production industry

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Abstract

Nine wineries and a water bottling plant situated in the Franschhoek Valley, South Africa, have decided to lead the way towards creating a safer and more sustainable environment in the Valley. As part of the Vignerons de Franschhoek ECO Association (VFEA), they adopted a multi-site approach and obtained, in December 2003, the first ISO 14001 multi-site certification in South Africa. This proactive approach allows them better overall environmental performances through mutual motivation, information sharing and comparison of practices by the different participating organisations of the Valley.

At the initiation of the project, the major concerns were associated with a lack of sound environmental management and training of employees. Of particular concern was also the lack of monitoring and measurement of environmental performance key indicators, especially in water consumption and wastewater disposal areas. Although the system is still in its juvenile stage, it already showed some effluent quality improvements through better wastewater management, better control over chemical stores as well as definite improvement in water management and increase in solid wastes recycling. The latter improvements will definitely entail long term cost savings should the system be continually and properly maintained.

It is the intention of the VFEA to create a more environmentally friendly Valley by convincing others to be more environmentally responsive and expanding the ISO 14001 principles to other areas of the organisations including the farms, to other wineries and ultimately to the whole Franschhoek Valley.

Keywords: Eco Association, Environment Management System, Franschhoek Valley, environmental performance

Introduction

Today's competitive market in concert with more stringent legislations require companies to be more environmentally friendly than your competitors whilst remaining cost-effective, efficient and delivering products/services of a high quality standard. Current South African legislation, i.e. National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 and Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, insists on the need for a company to have a structured approach or strategy in place to reduce the environmental impacts of its activities, services and products. The wine industry is no exception in this respect and faces a challenge regarded as a potential hurdle in the continuation of their practices. The development of an effective Environmental Management Strategy/System (EMS), i.e. ISO 14001, has therefore been identified as one of numerous tools to assist in meeting the above requirement.

The Western Cape in South Africa is known internationally for its winemaking activities and its scenic vineyard landscapes. Less obvious, however, is the amount of wastes generated during the processing of grape into its nobler form, known as wine. The project was conceptualised after the Rupert and Rothschild Winery in the Valley had been awarded the first ISO14001 certification in South Africa. At the certificate presentation function, Dr Anton Rupert commented that it would be ideal if the entire Franschhoek Valley became ISO 14001 compliant. Subsequently, the two other

Rupert wineries, L'Ormarins and La Motte, also went through the ISO 14001 certification process and the course was set for the first ISO 14001 multi-site certification of this type in South Africa! Nine wineries and a water bottling plant situated within a radius of 30km in the Franschhoek Valley decided as a group (Eco Association) to tackle this challenge together heading towards a friendlier environment and a more sustainable future. As part of the Eco Association are Agusta Wines, Boekenhoutskloof, Boschendal, La Couronne, La Vie de Luc, Mont Rochelle, Moreson, Stony Brook, Rickety Bridge and Vrede en Lust.

Multi-site approach towards EMS implementation within the same company is nowadays more common, however the alliance of independent organisations in taking the route towards a more sustainable environment in the Valley made it a unique approach as each company reveals a peculiar management structure and style. In partnership with regulatory authorities, this proactive approach allows distinguished overall environmental performances through mutual motivation, information sharing and comparison of practices by the different participating organisations of the Valley.

Heading towards better environmental performance

The figure on the next page depicts the status of the Eco Association environmental commitment before the EMS implementation commenced.

The following were identified as particular concerns at initiation of the project:

- The lack of management awareness and understanding of the environmental impacts of their activities:

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