Introduction to Sustainable Event Standards

Driven by industry professionals seeking clear, uniform definitions of a sustainable event, no fewer than four separate and unique voluntary standards-related initiatives are now available or are in-development. By 2012, it is expected that each standard will be released to market to support the sustainable event process for meeting planners, organizers and industry suppliers. This document is provided to facilitate industry familiarity with standard and to explain their similarities and differences.

The existing, and emerging, standards applicable to sustainable events are:
- BS 8901:2007 specification for a sustainable event management system
- ISO20121: Sustainability in event management
- APEX/ASTM Green Meeting and Events Voluntary Standards
- GRI (Global Reporting initiative) Sector Supplement for Events

What is a Standard?

A formal standard is based on the consensus of stakeholder opinion, meeting the requirements of an independent standards organization. A standard can be described as an industry-established norm or requirement. It is usually a formal document that sets uniform engineering or technical criteria, methods, processes and practices to

Each country has a standards body, the majority of which are members of the International Organization for Standardization, or ISO.

What is a management system?

Sustainable management systems refer to the management of an organization's environmental, social and economic programs in a comprehensive, systematic, planned and documented manner. It includes the organizational structure, planning and resources for developing, implementing and maintaining policy for sustainability. The objectives and targets are set by the organization itself and should lead to a continual improvement year by year. Conformity with a management system can be demonstrated in one of three ways:
- First party: self-determination and self-declaration by the organization seeking compliance
- Second party: confirmation of conformance by parties having an interest in the organization, such as clients, or by other persons on their behalf
- Third party assurance by an independent certification body

British Standard (BS) 8901 for Sustainable Events

BS8901 became the first voluntary standard for a sustainable management system for events to be available to the meetings industry. Updated and re-released in September 2009, the British Standards' BS 8901:2009 *Specification for a sustainable event management system with guidance for use* has now been tested by international events, both large and small.

BS 8901 was developed by a BSI committee comprised of standards writers and professionals from the meetings and events industry. Like all formal standards, BS8901 must be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure relevance and applicability to industry needs. BSI has responsibility for its review and integrity.

BS 8901 is designed to inform an event management 'system'. It is not a checklist or a 'how to' guide. Instead, it provides requirements for the strategic approaches and processes, for planning and managing sustainable events. It requires identification and documentation of key sustainability issues which might include: venue selection, operating procedures, supply chain management and procurement, communications, transport, and others.

The standard is applicable not only to large events such as music festivals and the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP15), but can also be applicable throughout the sector supply chain encompassing

- Event organizers
- Venues
- Destinations
- Organizations and/or individuals in the supply chain

If the established criteria are met, and if required procedures are well documented, the event management system may be eligible to earn a self-certification designation, or be eligible to be certified by a 3rd party as compliant with the BS8901 standard. It is important to note that the event is simply the outcome of the event management system and is itself not certifiable. The planning process or 'event management system' is what is subject to standards compliance.

Although it was originally created for the UK events industry in anticipation of the 2012 London Olympics, BS 8901 has now been used all around the world by organizations such as COP15, Microsoft, MPI, and the US Green Buildings Council.

For more information on BS 8901 visit http://www.bsi-global.com/bs8901

International Standard Organization (ISO) 20121

Beginning in 2009 and continuing until 2012, the International Standards Organisation (ISO) is developing an internationally recognized sustainability standard called ISO20121. The ISO20121 sustainability in event management standard will take a management systems approach to event planning. ISO20121 builds on BS8901 and integrates key elements of the ISO26000 Social Responsibility guidance standard. Thereby it will provide enhanced management system specification and guidance on environmental, social and economic sustainability.

To be deemed compliant with the standard, an event management system requires the identification of specific goals, key sustainability issues, policy clarification, supply chain management, effective oversight and management review of the event planning system and effective stakeholder engagement protocols.

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is the world's largest developer and publisher of International Standards comprising of over 159 international standards bodies. All members have been invited to participate and vote on the outcome of the process. Currently over 26 countries (including Japan, Germany, Canada, Austria, Switzerland, Spain, US, China) are involved in ISO20121 together with leading sector associations (GMIC, MPI, UFI) who provide liaison guidance. Release for ISO20121 is planned for early **2012.**

http://www.iso.org/iso/pressrelease.htm?refid=Ref1281

APEX/ASTM Green Meeting Standards

The Convention Industry Council's APEX initiative for green meeting and events best practices is being created by the meeting industry standards body, APEX, in collaboration with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Green Meeting Industry Council.

The APEX/ASTM standards are specific, measurable, performance based criteria designer for suppliers and planners. They use a checklist and scoring level to gauge performance. They cover nine areas and outline four levels of event and meetings performance

- Accommodation
- Audio/Visual and Production
- Communication
- Destinations
- Exhibits
- Food & Beverage
- Meeting Venue
- On-Site Offices
- Transportation.

Throughout 2009, the standards were submitted both through the APEX voluntary consensus process and the ASTM International process for review and approval. ASTM is one of the largest voluntary standards development organizations in the world. Once approved the best practices developed will be accredited standards.

The APEX panel and over 200 volunteers spanning 9 time-zones from the meetings industry, government, international organizations and NGOs voluntarily participated in the development of the APEX green meeting standards. The anticipated release date for the standards is summer 2010.

The US Government federal purchasing program intends to use the standards as part of its criteria in the procurement of services for government-run meetings and conferences.

For more information on APEX

http://www.conventionindustry.org/apex/inprogress.htm

GRI

The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is an international NGO and collaborating centre of the United Nations Environment Program that has, over the last 10 years, developed the world's most widely used framework for voluntary sustainability reporting used by 78% of the largest 250 companies in the world (G250).

The GRI G3 Sustainability Reporting Framework provides guidance and key performance indicators that create the conditions for the transparent and reliable reporting of sustainability information. Today, the G3 guidelines are already being used by events such as COP15, the Olympics and the European World Cup.

Today the GRI reporting framework lacks specific guidance and performance indicators for the event sector. Consequently, GRI is creating a Sector Supplement for the events industry, which will result in a global and free standardized framework for sectoral sustainability reporting. It will ensure that sustainability reports by events organizers effectively cover the key issues and are comparable. The sector specific supplement provides guidance on the reporting management approach and provides specific performance indicators covering environmental, human rights, labour practices, society and product responsibility aspects of event reporting.

The event sector supplement is being created following a multi-stakeholder approach comprising of hundreds of representatives from NGOs, the events industry (sports, corporate, music, government) and reporting experts. Release is planned for mid 2012.
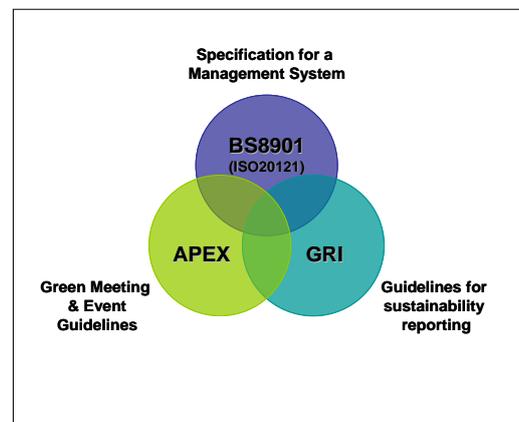
For more information on GRI
http://www.globalreporting.org/ReportingFramework/SectorSupplements/Events/

Complement and not compete.

It is important for all users to understand that the three standards are different in their approach to defining a sustainable event standard and can, therefore be used in conjunction with one another for optimum sustainable event organization and result.

- The BS 8901 and ISO20121 standard are management systems written to inform the process of organizing an event.
- The APEX ASTM standard provides definitions of specific measured and operational actions that comprise a sustainable event.
- The GRI guidelines inform how to report on the impacts of an event and provide common Key Performance Indicators.

The standards work well independently or in collaboration as frameworks for sustainable events and sustainable meetings industry businesses.

APEX/ASTM, ISO, BSI and GRI have been in communication during the development of the standards. The Green Meeting Industry Council supports and is highly involved in all processes.

"Many people have asked how these standards will differ from or duplicate the British Standard BS8901 Sustainable Events Standard," says Amy Spatrisano, Chair of the APEX Green Meetings and Events Practices Panel, who has been leading the APEX effort. *"It is important to note that the two standards are different in their approach to defining a sustainable event standard. The BS 8901 standard is a management system written to inform the process of organizing an event, while the APEX standard provides definitions of specific operational actions with key performance measures. The standards will work well independently or in collaboration as frameworks for sustainable events."*

Amy Spatrisano, GMIC President

Don't reinvent the wheel

There are currently many other regional green meeting standards in operation or in development around the world. To our knowledge these are not supported by International Standards bodies. The GMIC strongly recommends that anyone, or any country, looking for a standard should first contact BSI, ISO, GRI and/or APEX to see how these existing programs can fulfill their local needs today. A well defined standard can take over 3 years to create and too many standards will confuse buyers and planners, diluting the impact and benefit of the initiative to bring clarity and uniformity to sustainable event organization and reporting.

For more information

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